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Interview with

Dr. Arthur M. Sampley

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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ms. Margurite Haggard

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Approved: Arthur M. Sampley
(Signature)

Date: April 5, 1975

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Oral History Collection

Arthur M. Sampley

Interviewer: Ms. Marguerite Haggard

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: November 8, 1973

Ms. Haggard: This is Marguerite Haggard interviewing Dr. Arthur M. Sampley at his home in Denton, Texas, November 8, 1973. The purpose of this interview is to reminisce with Dr. Sampley as a man of letters, particularly the poet, and the man in the making of the poet.

To begin with, Dr. Sampley, I believe I'll ask you for a short biographical sketch, showing your background and education and your development as a teacher--where you have taught--and, particularly, your career at North Texas State University.

Dr. Sampley: I was born in Leander, Texas, January 9, 1903. I suppose cotton is a important factor in my background. My father was the manager and part owner of the Sampley Gin Company in Leander, and I got my name--my first name Arthur--really, from his young partner who was tragically killed in a gin accident. After he was killed, my parents added the name Arthur to my other

name of McCullough. I was educated in the Leander Public Schools and graduated as valedictorian, but, I must say, that was a class of seven. However, I was only fifteen when I graduated. The Leander schools were unaffiliated, and I took the examinations at the University of Texas and entered the University of Texas in 1918.

I graduated from the University of Texas in 1923 and was elected a Phi Beta Kappa in that year and appointed tutor in English at the University of Texas. This was really a part time teaching position, and I was working on my master's degree, which I received in 1925. From 1925 to 1928, I was an instructor in English at the University of Texas and was working on my doctor's degree. I realized that I needed more time to complete that degree, and so I studied from 1928 to 1930, completing my degree in 1930. And of course, I was not teaching during those two years.

When I received my doctor's degree from the University of Texas, two important events occurred. I married Vara Almon of Gainesville, whom I had met in a graduate Latin class; and we went to Natchitoches, Louisiana, where I was associate professor in Louisiana

State Normal College. During that year, I was offered the position as head of the Department of English at Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine and went there in 1931, where I remained until 1935. I think of those four years as perhaps the happiest of my life because I loved the western mountain country of Big Bend, and later on, I wrote a good deal of poetry about that country.

I was invited to become professor of English at North Texas--then North Texas State Teachers College, now North Texas State University--in 1935; and I came here and Denton has been my permanent home ever since. I was professor of English until I was commissioned into the Army Air Force, March 3, 1943, in the cadet training program. I taught in the Ground School at San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. That program began to fold up, and it was suggested that the Army would be glad to have some officers return to civilian life, if openings were available.

The president of North Texas offered me a position as director of libraries, and from 1944 to 1953, I served in that position. In 1953 I became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and later in the same year,

vice president for academic affairs at North Texas State University.

I held that position until 1959, when I asked to return to my first love of teaching; and from 1959 until my retirement in 1972, I was Distinguished Professor of English and taught courses primarily in British and American poetry of the twentieth century. On my retirement in 1972, I was invited to serve one more year as University Professor of Poetry, in which I delivered three lectures: the first, on Robinson and Frost; the second, on Eliot and Auden; and the third, on Yeats and Stevens.

I believe that's a brief account of my life. As you see, it has been centered in Denton, where I've lived since 1935.

Haggard: Thank you, Dr. Sampley. We see the twofold career of yours, as a Distinguished Professor of English and as educator in administration. This twofold career has been enouth for two men, and it certainly needs consideration and recording. But today we are interested in Dr. Sampley's creative career in literature, and we want to reminisce back in your life of the man in the making of the poet.

So we might look at the body of your published work to begin with. You have four volumes of books of verse. Is that not right?

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: And would you tell me some of the awards that these--these books all have awards--could you tell me some of the awards they have received?

Sampley: The last three books were chosen each year (of their publication: Of the Strong and the Fleet in 1947; Furrow with Blackbirds in 1951; and Selected Poems 1937-1971 in 1971) as the best book of poems by a Texan. This award was made by the Texas Institute of Letters, which is an organization of many of the prominent writers of the state.

Individual poems have, in each of the volumes, won awards. I have won awards from the Poetry Society of Texas, the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Poetry Society of America. I've won three. No, I've won, I suppose, six annual awards of the Poetry Society of America. And I was also, of course, appointed Poet Laureate of Texas by the Legislature for the years 1951 and 1952.

Haggard: These literary activities and associations come out of your work as a poet and are strenuous because you participated in the activities. You didn't tell us that in 1943 and in 1952-1953 you were president of the Texas Institute of Letters.

Could you tell how that--the birth of that organization--how it developed within that decade?

Sampley: It was organized in 1936. That was the Texas Centennial, and a group of fifty writers were organized as the Texas Institute of Letters. The organization at first perhaps did not attract much attention; but, I believe, it was in 1946 that Mr. Carr P. Collins of Dallas offered a thousand-dollar award for the best book by a Texan. Since that time, the organization has offered substantial prizes for books of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and some historical writing. The Institute meets each year. This year it will meet in Dallas.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, besides being the Poet Laureate of Texas in 1952, you have, also, been connected with the Poetry Society of Texas.

Sampley: Yes, I have been a member of the Poetry Society of Texas since 1935 and served in 1951 as president of the Poetry Society of Texas. I served a number of

years, also, as vice president. I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to that organization for many friends, and, also, for the prizes and encouragement I received from that organization. I should like to say that it is open to all residents of Texas, and it is now a very thriving group of seven or eight hundred members. And it awards prizes totaling over three thousand dollars each year.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, this is where the poet really makes his money, isn't it? Prizes?

Sampley: In prizes, yes . . .

Haggard: . . . unless he can collect his poems in a book and publish them and have a best seller. Now you have done that with your Selected Poems . . .

Sampley: No, I haven't had a best seller . . .

Haggard: . . . in 1971.

Sampley: Well, the book, I am pleased to say, has more than paid the publication costs, which is pretty good for a book of poetry; but the books of poetry do not make money for the author. The authors win in prizes, I think, more frequently.

Haggard: But Dr. Garrett Ballard says the book is in its second binding, and he does think he has a best seller on his hands.

Sampley: (chuckle) Well, I'll have to leave that up to him.

Haggard: Well, that's what he says.

Sampley: I want to pay my tribute to Dr. Ballard, who very kindly . . . this book was published by the North Texas State University Press in the year I retired, and Dr. Ballard acted as the business manager for this enterprise. Dr. Ballard is a lifelong friend of mine, and I very much appreciate his volunteer work in doing that.

Haggard: We all appreciate him because the poems of the stature that are in this book have received wide acclaim; and your book reviews make this book worthwhile, if it didn't become a best seller which, I think, it is becoming. And talking about the publication, this was published in the North Texas State University Press . . .

Sampley: Yes . . .

Haggard: . . . and was a fine volume. I'd like to talk about some of your early publications. Now you have published poems in the major periodicals of America for more than a quarter of a century . . .

Sampley: Yes . . .

Haggard: . . . and then your first volume of poems . . . your first volume . . . what was your first published volume of work?

Sampley: It was "This Is Our Time" which shows clearly the background of World War II. The title poem is actually a statement of the responsibility which our generation had in that very critical time which America and the whole world faced. The poem was written in 1941, and it somehow struck a responsive note then.

Haggard: This goes back to your poetry covering people and places and events . . .

Sampley: Yes . . .

Haggard: . . . and that event clearly stands there. Now who is the actual publisher of this?

Sampley: The Kaleidograph Press. The Kaleidograph Press was owned and operated by two people whom I didn't especially know well when they brought out my book, but who later became very good friends of mine--Whitney and Vaida Montgomery, who devoted their life to poetry. Mr. Montgomery was a man of substantial means, but he was very much interested in poetry. They published the Kaleidograph magazine, and they published books of poetry. They brought out all my books on a royalty basis, which I very much

appreciated. I had a very warm friendship with them which lasted until the time of their deaths.

Haggard: You are saying that they brought them out on a royalty basis. A lot of the poets have books published but not on royalties. They pay for them ourselves.

Sampley: Yes, that's right.

Haggard: So your poetry has stood on its own from the beginning. I'd like to go back to a book you didn't mention: your book of plays.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: Tell us about that because drama is important in your life.

Sampley: What I was trying to do, I suppose, this . . .

Haggard: Tell us about it. What is the title?

Sampley: Well, the title of the book was The Marriage of Frances Arden and Other One-Act Plays, and I am sure that grew out of my interest in drama as a student at the University of Texas. What I tried to do was what many people have tried to do in this time. And that is to adapt verse to the play, the verse as the dialogue of the play. This, perhaps in our time, has been done most successfully by T. S. Eliot and perhaps Maxwell Anderson. But it isn't easy to do because nowadays we are accustomed to short . . . (telephone rings and recorder is stopped)

Haggard: Now, let's see, Dr. Sampley, going back to your concern of drama . . .

Sampley: Yes, I was trying to do what, I suppose, in our time T. S. Eliot and Maxwell Anderson have done most successfully, and that is to adapt verse to the dramatic form.

After I published that volume, I also submitted volumes to the competition at Stanford University; and my play _Last Illusion_ won second honors and was read at Stanford University. Then my second play, _Distant Harvest_, won first honors and was produced at Stanford University.

Haggard: Did you see this?

Sampley: I saw the first one. I was there in 1938 and saw the first one, but I couldn't be there in 1939.

I learned a good deal about writing from working with those plays, but I transferred my interest from drama to poetry about 1940. And my work as a poet--although I had written many poems before--but I began to take poetry seriously about 1940.

Haggard: Then when you came back from your Air Corps service, you came into the library . . .

Sampley: That's right . . .

Haggard: . . . as director of libraries, and I suppose this gave you more time for your poetry.

Sampley: Well, in a sense, it did because when I was professor of English, I felt an obligation to produce scholarly articles in the field of Elizabethan dramatic literature. But when I was director of libraries, I didn't feel that obligation; and I did have time to devote to my creative energies to writing poetry.

Haggard: Your scholarly research is one body of your literary work, and it goes back a long way because (published in the Modern Language Association series) in 1931, I saw an article about the text of Peele's "David and Bethsabe."

Sampley: Yes, that's right. I published those articles . . . let's see, there were about four of them--which I derived from my work on Peele for my doctor's dissertation.

Haggard: I wondered what your doctor's dissertation was about. Could you tell me--going back to your university days--what writer has had a great influence in your life?

Sampley: Well, the writer who really started me on my career as a teacher was Shakespeare. When I read Hamlet in my senior year in high school, I saw for the first time--I understood for the first time--what a supreme genius could do with language. And from that time on, I had a great and abiding love for poetry. And that changed the course of my life; it determined what I would follow

as a profession. I didn't know at the time, but it did.

Haggard: In reminiscing and thinking back, your poems have such a dramatic quality. You write about people like Edwin Arlington Robinson. Are your people real?

Sampley: Most of them are. I say real. One doesn't know, of course, what goes on inside of real people . . .

Haggard: . . . that's right.

Sampley: . . . but my sonnet sequence "The Betrayers" was written about a couple found dead in a hotel room, and it was an actual incident in Austin. And the doctor involved was the doctor who attended my mother, and the woman who was not the doctor's wife was the wife of a man who taught me psychology at the University of Texas. These were real people. That was a tragic incident, and I wrote a poem inspired by that event. But I certainly wouldn't say that I was writing the story of real people. That was my interpretation.

Haggard: Yes, you have a very fertile imagination, and that incident produced a very strong poem, a powerful poem.

George Bond, a reviewer in the Dallas Morning News, said your poems weren't all pretty, but they had the

tough fiber of life. You were talking about Shakespeare lasting . . . George Bond says that your poems . . . you have poems that will last after many of us are gone.

Sampley: I appreciate it very much, his saying that, because he is, in my judgement--well, I know he may have been just complimenting me--but he is a genuine lover of poetry and a good poet himself.

Haggard: Back to people influencing your life, did you have a professor that . . .

Sampley: Yes, I would say the professor who influenced my life most was the man under whom I wrote my master's thesis and then wrote my doctor's dissertation, Professor Robert A. Law of the University of Texas. Professor Law was a man who had a fine sense of humor, and he was, I thought, a very stable and wise person. And I have consciously and unconsciously molded my teaching career from his example. I looked on him not only as a teacher but as a mentor and a friend, and I revere his memory.

Haggard: In thinking about persons, places, and events, your love for the Southwest is shown in your poems. It is your cultural hearth, so to speak, because you usually have a section in your books with poems of the Southwest. And you have already told us when you fell in love with the country.

Sampley: Yes, the Big Bend of Texas has been, I suppose, my spiritual home. I knew--when I saw the country--I had an affinity for it. Many people don't like it; it's stark and bare. It's a desert land, but I felt that the creation of the world was laid bare before my eyes there. And the history of the earth and of the Indians--all of the past--was there.

I think one of the themes that recurs in my poetry is the past in the present, and the past of the earth is revealed in the Big Bend country.

Haggard: You began writing nature poems, more or less. Is that right?

Sampley: That's right. My earliest work shows my interest in character studies and in the Big Bend section. My later work, which is emphasized in my last volume, shows--also, I think--my interest in the past but in a somewhat different way. I had by that time become interested in Greek drama, and I saw--or thought I saw--a parallel between the Greeks and ourselves. The Greeks had reached the highest peak of culture which man attained up until the Renaissance; and they were conscious of the fact that their position was precarious. And they, therefore, had what I would call a tragic sense of life.

This is a great life we have; this life may not last long. We would like to know how we can make it last long; we would like to avoid tragedy, but we see tragedy approaching.

Now I have the feeling that in our time we have the same sense. We know we have reached a very high peak of civilization. We are sensitive to the fact that there are dangers which threaten us. We are in a very similar position to the Greeks; and so in my last book, Selected Poems 1937-1971, especially in the first section, I was trying to show the past in the present: our kinship with the poeple of the past who have achieved greatness and who have endured tragic suffering, and trying to show that we are a part of that long pageant of man, that we are involved in the drama of the ages just as the Greeks were.

Haggard: That reminds me of Violette Newton's review of this book. She is our new Poet Laureate.

Sampley: Yes, yes, I know Violette Newton.

Haggard: But she is speaking of your character poems--of modern man being in these dramatic settings--that actually stripped us to the bone, and she did say that it would take us a semester of study to look into your characters;

so I think your book might be a textbook for us to keep. And then she said what you were telling us. She said at the end of her review, "Lo, here's a poet. Listen to this man!" I am paraphrasing it, but do you remember the review?

Sampley: Yes, I remember. I was very much pleased with her review. She is a gifted poet herself and has a new volume of poetry which I have ordered. I haven't seen it yet.

Haggard: I'll share my volume with you. Now back to this serious conversation. You gave many lectures through the years as a teacher, and a lot of your creative effort went to your lectures. But these distinguished lectures that you gave, "Six Against Chaos," you told us about earlier. You have studied poets who have looked at the world and modern civilization, and you wrote of the tensions of Robert Frost in one article. But then back to this lecture, the last one, "Stevens and Yeats," you spoke of those men as presenting man's vision of the world as a tension between imagination and reality.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: I am reviewing this to ask if the tensions of modern man can be relieved by poetry in some way?

Sampley: Well, the reason that I chose these six writers--whom I regard as the major writers of the first half of this century, writing in English--is that each one was attempting to interpret man's problem of adjusting to his civilization through his poetry. These men were what I might call--not only poets; they were in a sense--prophets. They were trying to help man find his way through the difficult times in which they were living, and each poet, of course, had his own solution.

I thought that Robinson and Frost had some things in common, in that they tended to see man's problem as coming from his own nature, his inability, really to master his own selfish desires and turn them to the common good.

I saw Eliot and Auden as finding the answer to the problems of man in Christianity, as saying in effect, man alone cannot accomplish this adjustment; but man, by accepting the plan of life outlined by Jesus, can make this adjustment and find a good life and a peaceful life.

Wallace Stevens and Yeats thought that man would achieve this through his imagination, that he would--as I said--restructure chaos. Reality is a kind of chaotic

world, and the world of mankind is somewhat chaotic. The poet with his imagination can organize this chaos into a form which people can accept and live by. This was the attitude of Stevens and Yeats.

Now I didn't attempt to decide which had the right answer. I suppose I believe all of them to some extent, and no one of them altogether.

Haggard: But back to the tensions of modern man, you say for us to read and decide and work out our own salvation?

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: It can be done?

Sampley: It can be done! And it must be done because this is the only way that man can survive.

I was interested in an article recently in Harper's Magazine, showing man had gone through some very difficult centuries before; and this writer singled out the fourteenth century as one of the worst, when the Black Plague wiped out a third of the population of Europe. So man has gone through some difficult times before, and man can survive these times again.

Haggard: I wonder if I can change the subject abruptly and come down to you as a writer of poems. You've had a fertile imagination, and you've had the scope of world characters

for your characters and thinking. How is a poem born? How does an idea take hold of you?

Violette Newton writes a first draft and puts it under the bed, she says (chuckle), in a box and lets it simmer awhile. We are interested in how you handle the creative gift.

Sampley: Well, occasionally, a poem will come quickly . . .

Haggard: . . . and full blown . . .

Sampley: . . . and full blown. I think this happens rather rarely. I will use an example, a poem which appeared, I think, in my third book or maybe it was my second. I am not sure. I was seated in church one morning and was startled to see a seeing eye dog leading a girl up the aisle of the church, and the dog took her to an empty pew and seated her. Well, I knew there was a poem there, and that afternoon I wrote the poem and a week later sent it to the Saturday Evening Post. And it was accepted and published. Now poems don't usually come to me that way.

The way I usually write: I will sit down with my notebook before me, and I must have at least two hours ahead of me. Otherwise, it's no use trying. I will jot

down maybe the name of a person, or it might be a mood or it might be a phrase. And I'll have, say, a half-dozen possible topics for a poem before me; and I'll look over those and then one of them--now, this is what I call inspiration--one of them will suddenly appeal to me or as I might say "catch fire."

And then I start to work on this, and I usually work about two hours, by which time I may have completed the poem or I may be half-way through it. If I'm half-way through it, then I'll finish it at another sitting. This is the way that most of my poems have been written, and it's a combination, I would say, of inspiration and prodding and hard work. But after the poem is written, it's just--from my point of view--half through because there will always be lines in it which need to be improved.

My first wife was an excellent critic, and I used to try out my poems on her. This is the best kind of help you can get, if you can get it; you usually can. She would tell me quite frankly if she thought the poem was not any good. And if it wasn't, I usually believed her because I discovered that in a few weeks I felt the

same way about it. But if she thought it was good, then she would point out the weak lines in it, and then I would have to go to work on the weak lines.

Haggard: You know Dr. Campbell--Walter S. Campbell--who was Stanley Vestal, his writer's name--in his professional writing course at the University of Oklahoma, he says that everyone needs a reader. You need a reader.

Sampley: Yes, yes.

Haggard: It doesn't have to be a scholarly person or a writer, but a reader, and that's important, and you are reiterating that.

Sampley: Yes, yes, that was a great help to me. Nowadays, of course, when I write, I get somewhat the same results by letting the poem lie around for a few weeks after I finish it, and then I'll go back and work on it.

Haggard: Poems are happenings, all right, and, as you say, moods. I want to ask another question or so. This comes to poetry and the definition of poetry.

When you were in the Texas Year Book of Poetry in their golden anniversary issue, you had a picture being the third president of the Poetry Society of Texas and a poem as a definition of poetry. Do you recall that? (chuckle)

Sampley: Yes, I remember . . .

Haggard: It was . . .

Sampley: . . . The sudden flash of beauty
Wine, and demonic laughter
Experienced simultaneously
With the morning after.

Haggard: Does that still hold, in a sense, as your definition of poetry: recollected emotion that is really relived?

Sampley: Yes, I think that's true. I think it _is_ true.

Haggard: Do you think the definition stands?

Sampley: I have to say that William Wordsworth said that first . . .

Haggard: Yes, yes, yes, of course.

Sampley: "Emotion recollected in tranquility."

Haggard: Yes, yes, yes . . . .

Sampley: But so much poetry, and a good deal of mine, really, springs from a feeling of nostalgia, trying to recapture something that cannot, after all, be recaptured. Most of my poems about the Big Bend, I think, are fundamentally poems of nostalgia. In trying to go back and capture a time and a place, sometimes you can get the feeling and sometimes you can't. Now that doesn't apply to all of my poetry, of course, because the poetry in the first section of my new book is not really of that kind. It's more of an attempt to grapple with the problems

of man within himself and within his environment. That is a different and a more immediate thing, but it does well up from within you, somehow.

Haggard: Oh, that's profound . . . for creative people and creative leaders . . .

Sampley: Well, I'll tell you . . . this, I think, illustrates partly what I'm saying. I wrote the poem "Proud Horses," and it grew out of two completely separate things. I had seen a herd of horses being rounded up by a Mexican vaquero, and these horses were being driven into a corral where they were going to be saddled and ridden. They knew that and they were rebellious; they didn't want to go. I saw the picture there, but I didn't make a poem of it then. It was a good many years later that I was down in the same country, in the Big Bend, and I climbed a mountain. When I was young, I climbed mountains many times and I loved doing it. But when I came down from this mountain, I knew that I would never climb another mountain. I was forty-five years old, and I simply could not get rested. I knew that my youth was gone, and so I connected that event with the horses being

rounded up because all of us are eventually rounded up. So it was after the mountain climbing experience that I wrote the poem about the horses.

Haggard: That's interesting.

Sampley: So I think this illustrates the fact--and I believe it is true--that in good poetry there are often two levels of meaning. There is the surface level, which may simply tell a story. In "Proud Horses" it is the vaquero rounding up the horses. Then there is the level below the surface, which is really real; and this is that the vaquero himself. By the vaquero, I mean _any_ man is eventually rounded up by the forces of age and diversion.

Haggard: Yes, yes.

Sampley: And I think that nobody does that better, in my notion, than Robert Frost. You hear people say, "Frost is a good, easy poet." They find him easy to read. Well, yes, he is easy to read; but often when you look beneath the surface, you find another meaning there, too.

Haggard: It takes reflection on the part of the writer and the reader, too.

Sampley: Yes, that's right. For example, Frost's wonderful poem which everyone has read and admired, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." It seems to be about a man just stopping to look at the woods fill up with snow; but when you look below the surface, you see it's so much more than that. Some people, maybe, have found more in it than is there. Some people said this poem is the death wish. This man wants to get out of life. I don't, myself, interpret the poem that way, but here is a man who would like--you know--to watch the woods fill up with snow:

> But I have promises to keep
> And miles to go before I sleep

So the more you think about that poem, the more you see in it. I think that good poetry often has those two levels of meaning.

Haggard: I think people will be reading your poems a long time with reflection.

And now that you've retired, do you have plans for any particular thing you have waited to accomplish or do? I don't think you've waited; I think you'd dived right in (chuckle) as they came up.

Sampley: Well, I was talking with my stepdaughter last night, and she said, "Well, you should be writing your best poetry now." Well, I wish I could and were able to, but I know that I have done already better work than I am capable of doing.

I can still write poetry, and I do have some things to say, but I cannot write as well as I did ten years ago. I simply have to face up to this, and one thing I'm determined is that I am not going to publish a poem just to be publishing them. They have to suit me. They have to be what I want, and I occasionally write something that I still like, but it doesn't happen so often as it used to. Nevertheless, I enjoy living.

I enjoy reading and I have a wonderful group of friends that make my life easier. I also have, of course, my two stepchildren. I mentioned my first wife. I should mention my second wife whose life has enriched mine a great deal, although she died early. She was, I believe, fifty-five when she passed away; nevertheless, her life has continued on into mine through my stepchildren, and I find a great deal of satisfaction in sharing their lives, which I have done. They are always

interested in coming to see me. My stepson, of course, is not now living in Denton, but my step-daughter lives in Richardson and comes over rather often.

Haggard: That's very rewarding. Dr. Sampley, you've shared so much of your life and your letters with us this morning. It has been most rewarding. We thank you very much.

Sampley: Well, thank you, Mrs. Haggard.

Haggard: And we look forward to reading those poems that you are going to be satisfied to release (chuckle).

Sampley: Well, thank you, Mrs. Haggard. It has been a pleasure talking to you.

Oral History Collection

Dr. Arthur M. Sampley

Interviewer: Ms. Marguerite Haggard

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: December 7, 1973

Ms. Haggard: This is Marguerite Haggard interviewing Dr. Arthur M. Sampley at his home at 2011 West Oak Street, Denton, Texas, December 7, 1973. This interview is the second in a series considering Dr. Sampley's academic and literary career at North Texas State University. The purpose of this interview is to extend and enlarge Dr. Sampley's discussion of his poetry, particularly his poems that have been prize-winning poems and poems that have won distinguished awards.

Dr. Sampley, today I'd like for you to tell us something about your poems that you think are of the greatest significance and talk about them in depth.

Sampley: Well, I think that the best poems that I've written--and this is not only my judgement, but it is the judgement of some of my friends who are pretty good critics--are the poems in the first section of my most recent

book, the poems which I have grouped under the general title of "Act Two Thousand." There is a recurrent theme in these poems, and that is suggested by "Act Two Thousand" that human history tends to repeat itself--not only in the same way but with very similar problems--and some of my friends have noticed that I've made many references to the Greeks in these poems. The reason that I have is that I think that really the Greeks probably had similar problems to ours, and they reacted to them in the way that we do.

I thought I might discuss two poems which were award-winning poems. The first one--the one that won the Edwin Markham Award in 1964--is entitled "The Epilogue Spoken by a Tape Recorder." Now this deals with, I think, one of the oldest problems in human history, and that is the conflict between the conscience of the individual and of the orders which may be given to him by someone in a position of authority. If we think of Sir Thomas Moore, or we can go back and think of Socrates, or we can think of Jesus Christ--all of these responded in various ways, and these that I have mentioned have responded heroicly. In other words,

they obeyed the voice of conscience and resisted the voice of authority. But the individual that I'm writing about here took the other way; he obeyed the voice of authority and forgot the voice of conscience. He has become, I suppose, consequently, a figure who is an object of disdain.

This was Adolph Eichmann, who was instructed by Adolph Hitler to eliminate the Jews and who had the primary responsibility of burning the Jews in ovens and was responsible through his commander-in-chief for the death of several million Jews. He escaped after World War II and went to South America and lived there for many years, but the Israelis tracked him down and kidnapped him out of South America and smuggled him into Palestine and tried him and gave him a trial. His defense was, "I was simply carrying out orders. It was not my responsibility."

And I thought this really caught a moral dilemma, and I would want to make a point of it--this poem was written in 1963--but I think this moral dilemma has been reenacted at times since this poem was written. The title is "The Epilogue Spoken by a Tape Recorder," and I'll read the poem.

Though I am buried, I am on the air.
I was, in the strictest sense of the word,
    not there.
You would call me Eichmann, but I cannot bear
That appellation . . . You may call me Zero.

I loved my children, I obeyed the laws,
I hailed the leader, joined in the applause,
I read the ads to see what I should wear
And bought the shirts approved for every hero.

I served the general and the general will,
Obeyed instructions, answered all my mail,
Killed only those whom I was told to kill.

I understood it all except the why;
They gave me names of those to put in jail;
They gave me orders for the ones to die;
I had my family to think of, I
Did not decide . . .

                    If anyone's to blame,
It was the leaders, but what could I do?
There were at first a few, only a few.
When millions died, I thought it was a shame.

They want to label it, to find a name.

I was condemned not by the law, but fate.
I was the man who happened to be there
When one state sought to try another state.
I was told, of all men, I was one to dare.

And I can see it as a tragedy
So wide it took three continents to frame,
And all of it was there except the heart:
The villain and the hero were the same.

The world is listening, I am on the air.

But if I did not live, I should not die:
They did not try me, but they tried the laws
That I obeyed . . .

There was a nobler art
Lost somewhere in the scenes I helped contrive.
There was a better way, a fresher start,
And I have glimpsed at times my tragic part.

I died in it, but I was not alive.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, this poem was first published in a magazine?

Sampley: Well, it first won the Edwin Markham Award, and then it was later published in the Virginia Quarterly Review.

Haggard: You sent it in to the American Poetry Society?

Sampley: Yes, for their annual contest.

Haggard: And this was 1964.

Sampley: That's right.

Haggard: Written in 1963.

Sampley: Well, yes, it was written in 1963 and won the award in 1964.

Haggard: That's marvelous.

Sampley: Now the other award-winning poem--it also won the Edwin Markham Award of the Poetry Society of America in the next year--is entitled "Act Two Thousand" and is intended to suggest by the title that this is a process that's been going on for perhaps two thousand years and longer. The idea for this poem came to me from the reading of the famous novel, The Magic Mountain, by Thomas Mann,

the great German novelist. He wrote a magnificent novel with symbolic overtones about a sanatorium, a tubercular sanatorium, on a mountaintop in the Swiss Alps. Gathered there were the people who formed a kind of microcosm or reflection of the world outside of them.

There were two characters that interested me especially. One of them was Naphta, who represented the intense, fanatic person with a great drive, with great certainty, who knew he was exactly right and was willing to sacrifice the whole world, and did, indeed, sacrifice his own life to maintain his point of view. The other was Settembrini, who represented the liberal democratic humanist tradition and the idea of reconciliation. These two men argued endlessly and finally Naphta challenged Settembrini to a duel, and when Settembrini made it clear that he was not going to shoot at Naphta, Naphta shot himself and killed himself. The conflict between the intense, zealous person and the person who hopes for some kind of reconciliation was what caught my fancy in this poem. I think this struggle has gone on throughout the ages,

and that's the reason I entitled the poem "Act Two Thousand." I'll read the poem.

The hero: well, let's call him Thomas Mann.

For extras: ministers and presidents,
Assorted armies, blood in technicolor,
Elderly statesmen, or their equivalents.

Enter the mountain that we all are on.

The cities are off stage or off the ground
Depending on which ones you're looking for:
Their sound effect is that they have no sound.

Costumed as Faust, frowning like Hamlet, sick
To hold as 'twere the mirror to this peak,
To chart the pain, the fever, the mystique:

The tragic moment is not now a death:
There was a time when one tormented a Jew
Could hold the world suspended on a breath.

I have the fever, I am growing weak.

The sick world is the well one, there below
The fit men turn to cinders . . . here apart
We count each day the temblors of the heart.
We shall survive them, but what shall we do?

There are a few men yet, there are a few.

What brings the fever, what is it we seek?
Here where we barely have the strength to speak,
We snarl and tear each other to the quick.
We heal the bodies, we can make them go.
I can walk firmly into the abyss.

The cure may be in learning to be calm,
To keep the blood from flaming in the cheek.

Ah, but to burn it out, to drive right on,
To hold a nation in a sweating palm,
To end distress in overwhelming stress.

I burn and freeze upon this precipice
That crumbles under me: I am resigned
Neither to live nor die, but convalesce.

Now even the physicians acquiesce
In the infection, and the plague comes on.
I shall at least denounce the sick in mind.

Enter disaster. Exit Thomas Mann.

What I intended to suggest by the latter part of this poem is that Thomas Mann foresaw the future of Europe, he foresaw what Hitler was leading the world into, and he did denounce the sick in mind, but, of course, it cost him exile from Germany. I refer to that in the line, "Enter disaster. Exit Thomas Mann." Now this was the second poem to win the Edwin Markham Award.

Haggard: Now are there some other poems in this Selected Poems that you wanted to get into in depth?

Sampley: I might comment on the poems in the second section, the poems about the Big Bend. These poems are very personal to me because they are my youth--I think all of us would like to recapture our youth if we could. They take me back to the time when I was between 28 and 32 years old when I spent a great deal of time in this country climbing mountains, riding horseback, and camping. The poem

"Frontier Fort by Moonlight" is perhaps a good example of local history. When I lived in Alpine, old Fort Davis, which had been the frontier post immediately after the Civil War and was protection against the Indians in that area of the country, was falling into ruins. It has since been restored, so if you are in Fort Davis, you can see the fort--not as I saw it, but as some of the buildings have been restored--but when I was there it was simply crumbling to the ground. I wrote this poem, "Frontier Fort by Moonlight" about that frontier outpost.

Apaches on the palisades, the feathers
Whistling against the windy, storm-moon
    weathers,
The mustangs champing at the rawhide tethers--

Greasewood upon parade grounds, quarters
    crumbling,
Stone-toppled stables, and a frayed nag
    stumbling;
Under the barracks floor the rats are fumbling.

Through each wind-sieving roof and skewed
    foundation
The ghostly bugles blare to battle station.
Rest! for the ruins repel a ruined nation.

Haggard: This restoration was reported upon at a restoration conference this year at the Wyndale Complex. This was Miss Ima Hogg's gift to Texas for history.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: But that's quite interesting. Now, another poem?

Sampley: Another poem that has something to do with local history if you . . . we now read every year about the famous Terlingua cookout. When I lived in Alpine, Terlingua was not a ghost town; it was a living, mining town, and they mined quicksilver, and they worked the Mexicans there, I think, pretty hard--it was all Mexican labor. However, the overseer was a neighbor of mine, and I knew him and his family very well and liked them. They were good friends of mine.

When the vein began to play out and the federal government began to institute regulations of hours of labor, the mine no longer became profitable and Terlingua became a ghost town. Then those buildings were falling to ruin just as the ruins of the buildings of Fort Davis. I wrote this poem, "Ghost Town," about Terlingua after it had become a ghost town.

> Only little crosses
> Mark the village of quicksilver,
> Where laborers for sixty hours a week
> Pitted their haste against eternity,
> Digging from desert earth
> The ore that slides away
> From bones more malleable than cinnabar.

Only the crosses mark
Men that mined and were mined,
Drawn by the heavy ore,
Mingled briefly with more precious dust,
Discarded now beside the failing lode
That wind and lizards mine.

The desert which has no memory
Gradually hides
Debris of rocks and lives,
Slag of ore and bones,
Smooths the new scar
Over the old ones.

A pickaxe in a shaft,
A blue stone by a grave
Are minor ravages to a desert
Which buries dinosaurs and continents
And little crosses.

Haggard: That's nice.

Sampley: One poem which has been a sort of reading favorite of mine--I suppose I've read this poem to more groups than any other--is about a character who lived near what is now the entrance of the Big Bend National Park, the eastern entrance. His name was Bobcat Carter because, according to his account, he lived on tequila and bobcat dumplings. When some friends and I were on our way to what is now the Big Bend Park but which was then simply designated as the park, we were stopped by this character--he didn't literally stop us, but he waved his arms and flagged us down--and he looked like an interesting

character, so we stopped and had a conversation with him. I put that conversation into this poem which I call, "Ponce de Leon Among the Cactus."

A beard that seemed to grow out of his hat,
Some tattered denim clothes well patched
with skin,
A scent that might have come from pelts of cat
Without and from fermented drink within,
A touch of genius in profanity,
A glint of moonlight in his eye by day,
He seemed an ambulant variety
Of cactus standing strangely in our way.

"By Goddle mighty," said he, "people drive
As if they were retreating out of hell
Instead of streaking toward it. Man alive
Will never learn enough of life to tell
By traveling highways like a shooting star.
You might at least get out and say hello."
And when we did he took us to his bar
Cached in his dugout some six feet below.

"Tequila is the trapper's drink," he cried,
Tilting the jug into a golden flood.
"It purifies the breath and tans the hide,
Stiffens the whiskers and preserves the blood.
Then too it brings a little revenue,"
He added with a sly, suggestive wink.
"There's something in this desert stuff I brew
That makes a man last longer than you'd think.

"It's nearly fifty years since I first came
Too weak to cast a shadow in the sun,
And now I put the rattlesnakes to shame
In skinning through these hills at eighty-one.
The cactus in this God-forsaken ground
Needs powerful juice to live, and it's the truth
Tequila is the nearest thing I've found
To the lost fountain of eternal youth."

He handed us a glass of sleeping fire
That trickled down our throats and then awoke

And left no breath with which we might inquire
What kind of flame it was that had no smoke.
"Tequila takes your mind off other things--"
We coughed and nodded dumbly to agree--
"It takes the venom out of cactus stings
And cuts the distance that a man can see.

"There's plenty trouble somewhere in the world--"
He swept an arm out to a desert hill;
Panthers and eagles with their talons curled,
Bobcats and coyotes skulking for the kill.
Perhaps there may be men somewhere as bad,
And that no doubt would cause a man to think
The earth's no place to live, but when I've had
A thought like that, I always take a drink.

"And then my mind again grows clear and bright;
Tequila never fails, or almost never,
And if I could but once distill it right,
I might drain down a jug and live forever."
Musing upon this lack in his affairs,
He raised and tipped the jug, which gurgled on
And washed his few remaining woes and cares
As far away as eighty years had gone.

Haggard: Oh, that's something.

Sampley: He was a real character and lived there nearly another ten years. I don't know if he really was eighty-one or not, but he was a hale and hearty individual, and he lived his own kind of life.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, Reverend William Bard, a Texas poet, in his review of your book says that your love of the Transpecos country and the Southwest might--and this book of yours, the Selected Poems--might very well bring around a revival of poetry of the Southwest.

Sampley: Well, I hope that it does. Mr. Bard has written some very fine poems about the Southwest. I especially

like his poem "The Canyon," which he wrote about the Grand Canyon, is a very fine poem. It's only one, of course, of many poems which he has written about the western country.

Haggard: Do you have any prize-winning poems in the Southwest group that you would like to share? I know there have been . . .

Sampley: Well, some of my Southwestern poems won prizes of the Poetry Society of Texas . . . but, I don't think that . . . well, yes, I will read one which won the prize of the Poetry Society of Texas. It's one of my favorite poems; it's the last one in this group entitled "The Pour-Off." It has a very personal meaning for me because my first wife and I visited this Big Bend Park before there was any park there. A group of friends and we went down, and we rode down the three miles or two miles--I don't know, somewhere between two and three miles, I think--to what the cowboys at that time called "the pour-off." It had been renamed by the Park Service as "the window." It's an interesting formation--a kind of V-shaped formation--where you look out from that high Chisos

mountain valley into the foothills below, and it does form kind of a window. My wife and I returned to that place several times.

In this poem I have alluded to the fact that I lost her through death in 1954, not, of course, a death connected with the "pour-off," but the "pour-off" somehow symbolized to me the sharpness of that break in my life; everytime I return to that country, which I have many times, I have memories of our trips to the "pour-off."

I

Dry waterfall, pouring not water, time,
Floods past us, sucking at our knees,
    swirled years
Swept, eddying, gone, and we on this worn
    lip

Plunge too, the rock gives, this eroded hour
Shivers, shoots instant as our faces, shears
Deeper than space, to past: I clutch you,
    hold

Frantic on this abyss your body washed
Headlong and pleading: braced, I grasp
    firm air
And hold what none escapes--the crest,
    the fall.

II

Yet we two locked one moment on this brink,
Wrenched from each other's arms, swept clean
    of rock,
By the dry torrent, yet one fingertip,

One glance apart, imploring, one missed step,
Near as last minute, nearer even as gone,
Held and not held, the touch burned into nerve,

Cascading, poised the long unfalling fall,
Framed in this window, sheer as this sheared
rock,
You are the stream on which I am swept down.

III

Lashed on dry rock, tugged backward, slashed
and hurled
Toward this same ledge, I yield as hard as
stone,
Battered as this split boulder, in tableau

Reaching, not catching you, hang bruised and
tripped
On the world's lantern edge, know the down way,
Not as you, swift, imperious, but ground dead,

Inched barrenly, wind-levered, splintered,
crunched
Pebble by pebble into that skied chute
Through which the slim and dark-haired
foothills plunge.

Haggard: Oh, that's wonderful.

Sampley: So that is to me a very personal poem, and it did win a prize out of the Poetry Society of Texas. Now you were asking me which prize gave me the most pleasure, and I think it was "The Epilogue Spoken by a Tape Recorder," the first poem I read this afternoon. This is because I went with my second wife, Eva Joy, to New York to receive this prize, which was awarded at a dinner of the Poetry Society of America. We were very kindly received there, and I met some very interesting people. It was an occasion of joy, of course, and stands in very sharp contrast with the prize-winning poem of 1965 because in that year, though I was invited to go to New

York to receive the prize, I could not go because my wife in the meantime had had a stroke and, of course, I could not leave her.

Haggard: Oh, how sad! Are there any other poems in any of your volumes . . . your poems are collected in four volumes, four books of poetry, plus your book of dramatic verse--the plays--and we can read them, but we don't get the flavor of them like you give to us.

Sampley: Well, thank you.

Haggard: I noticed that the magazine, The Lyric, has awarded you some prizes.

Sampley: Yes, yes, it has. They were very kind to me, and I might read one of those prize-winning . . .

Haggard: They were annual awards . . .

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: And distinguished awards.

Sampley: Yes. Well, I always judge an award somewhat by how much they pay me, and these Lyric awards were $100 (chuckle), so that pleased me. I think I shall read the poem, "The Color of Time," which is on page 100 of my last book, which won an annual award of The Lyric magazine.

The Color of Time

This is the color of time, this is the shading,
The toning of leaves so slight that no one
    perceives
Them waver and chill against the strange
    horizon.

This is the feel of it: even the steady
    eyes on
Distance shift with the distance; sight
    deceives,
Changing the hues, causing the casual fading:

Rust into russet, weathering and grading
Into the film of frost that a man believes
He sees beneath what youth and love bedizen.

The color of time may be the slow horizon
Turning from us until no one perceives
That even the brightest shade is but a
    shading.

Haggard: You may have favorites that didn't win.

Sampley: Yes, I do have some favorites that didn't win. I might read, for example, "The Daughters of Danaus," which is a poem which requires a little interpretation. I got some of my poems from observations, some from my reading. I suppose I got this from my reading.

There was a play--it is not in existence but we know the plot of it--in Greek drama about fifty daughters of Danaus who were required for political reasons to marry the fifty sons of Egyptus. So averse were these daughters to this marriage that they made a compact, and they agreed that on the wedding night each one would stab her husband to death.

Each one took a knife to bed with her and forty-nine of them did actually stab their husbands to death. This is a very bloody story. One of them, however, did not stab her husband to death. I suppose she liked him all right. I thought I would treat this theme not tragically as it was treated in Greek drama, but playfully, and put it into modern terms. So I call this poem "The Daughters of Danaus."

The fifty sons lie dreamless now in bed
By fifty daughters that they have to wife.
Their suit is over, and their vows are said;
If there was struggle, pleasant was the strife.
They did not know that one should die by lead,
Another one beneath a butcher knife
Held by the hand for which he once had pled:
I sing of one who saved her lover's life.

Five, somewhat kinder, slew theirs by divorce
And two without that dubious benefit;
Four strangled erring husbands with remorse
And one in pince-nez did it with a writ;
And eight whose virtue should be trumpeted
Because each was a tender, loving wife
Died ere her man and left him worse than dead:
I sing of one who saved her lover's life.

Four died in car wrecks, one spilled from his
horse
Thinking of love, and one fell in a fit.
Two died of nagging, and two more of course
Perished of frostbite for the lack of it.
And seventeen with whom their doctors pled
Expired still clutching at a fork and a knife
Before a board which her dear hands had spread:
I sing of one who saved her lover's life.

Now priest and judge by whom the rites
were read
When blossoms, rings, and promises were rife,
Remembering the forty-nine now dead,
I sing of one who saved her lover's life.

Haggard: That's clever.

Sampley: Well, that's just a sort of a stunt poem.

Haggard: Kind of a fun poem.

Sampley: Yes. This is a very personal poem. It didn't win any prize, but in it I said something about myself which, I guess, most people wouldn't say about themselves. I had written a series of character studies which is the third group of poems in this book. As the concluding poem for that group of characters, all of whom came to a bad end, I wrote this poem which I entitled "Another."

Tonight the men and women I have drawn
Gather around me with their restless eyes
And probe at me as I have probed at them
And with no clearer answer. Why of us
These bitter tales retold a bitter way?
Why of the thousand others you have known
Do we retrace the sad and twisted ways
We never meant to go? Why once again
Are we arriving at these destinations
We bought no tickets for? Call it our folly,
Which some might call our luck, or call it sin,
We have paid our bills or gone to hell for it
According to our credit or religion,
And we who never had a chance at fame
Have earned at least oblivion. We are as dead
As any buried, and if we were alive
To you, we've no desire to live as ghosts
Because your mind is haunted.

Have you not thought
That we who seemed a cause of mirth or grief
Are not ourselves except as you have seen us
And may be nothing but the shape of you
Transformed in us as mirrors? Oh, no doubt
We were the waifs and stragglers you present,
But we were not together in one place
Until you called us, and now that we are here
It may be that among us is another
Whom you have never shown except in us.
We are not quite the friends a man would make,
But you have chosen us for some obscure,
Oblique design you may not care to seek
Lest it reveal the one lack that we had.
Not one of us but struggled desperately
To find the self that was not born in him.
And seeking for a life that was not his,
Found only in the end a death that was.
If I am Garver, Norlan, and Elaine
Compounded for some fate I never guessed,
Who are you standing in my shadow there
To fill the endless circle to the dark?

Haggard: Well, that is interesting.

Sampley: So, I suppose, I let the characters comment on me.

Haggard: That's something. Dr. Sampley, so many of your poems have been reprinted in other magazines and then in anthologies and collections. Was that a thrill?

Sampley: Yes, it pleased me, of course.

Haggard: Any surprises?

Sampley: Yes, the little poem, "The Ne'er-Do-Well," for example, was printed originally in a little poetry magazine called the Hawk and the Whippoorwill.

Haggard: I saw it in The Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle and Other Minor Verse that my niece brought home from high school.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: And later Scholastic Book Services used it in their material.

Sampley: I wrote this poem and forgot about it, and then I got a letter from the editor saying that an anthology wanted to use it and would pay me $10 for it. He sent me the $10, and then about a year later I got another letter which said the editors that originally printed it wanted to put it in another book, so I got another check for $10.

Haggard: Fine.

Sampley: And then it was reprinted a third time, and I got another check for $10, all for this same poem. That's not much money, of course, but it was pleasant anyhow, and I think this collection has been very widely circulated. "The Epilogue Spoken by a Tape Recorder" was reprinted in a college textbook which had a wide circulation and was used, for example, not only by North Texas State University, but by Ohio State University and Southern Methodist University and some colleges and universities in Canada.

Haggard: I'd like for you to read "The Ne'er-Do-Well" because . . . it's about the man up the persimmon tree.

Sampley: Yes, this was a real character, a friend of mine. He was a "ne'er-do-well," but he was a charming person, and he and I used to go squirrel hunting together. He taught me about the only things I knew about squirrel hunting. I was at that time about thirteen or fourteen years old.

The Ne'er-Do-Well

When Enoch should have been at work,
He might be fishing in the creek.
Or when the dewberries were ripe,
He'd leave his plowing for a week.
He'd take an hour to smoke a pipe,
Sitting with legs crossed like a Turk.
And yet the banker, looking grim
When Enoch with a note past due
Had left his corn patch to the cows,
Sought a persimmon grove he knew
And, finding Enoch in the boughs,
Stared long and wistfully at him.

(Chuckle) You know, he was an attractive person, but he just didn't do well as far as this world's goods are concerned. But he was a very nice person.

Haggard: And he was rich in many other areas and experience.

Sampley: Yes, and in human happiness, I think. He enjoyed life.

Haggard: Now you were speaking of your poems being in a college anthology. Dr. Ballard spoke about a couple of your poems relating to students and student relationships.

Sampley: Yes. He may have been thinking of "Class in Keats."

Haggard: Yes, "Class in Keats."

Sampley: That's on page 116.

Haggard: Would you like to share that with us?

Sampley: Yes, I was often aware that my students who seemed to be listening to me so assiduously had their minds on other things as well, and I tried to express that in this poem. I might explain that the poem uses a good many of the characters of Keats. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is the title of one of his poems about a woman who played on men with her fickleness. Hyperion is the hero of the poem he wrote about the fall of Hyperion, the original Sun God who was overturned by Apollo. Cynthia, of course, is the Moon Goddess who fell in love with Endymion. "Endymion" is the title of one of the poems of Keats. All of these then are references to the poems of Keats. And I saw in front of me these same characters with their minds not exactly on what I was trying to tell them.

La belle dame sans merci is taking notes
While fingering the pin she means to keep
Until the Easter ball; Hyperion, deep
In spring elections, puzzles out the votes
To keep Apollo from the senior floats;
And Cynthia with bodice cut too steep
Gazes upon Endymion fallen asleep
Under the drowsy lines the teacher quotes.

These silent figures are my Grecian urn
Engraved with boys not ripe for sacrifice
And girls who, when pursued, are not quite
loath
Chiseled here in their spring before they
turn
Unto the ancient rites of avarice
Or join the obscene battle with an oath.

Haggard: Now Dr. Ballard had a poem that was befitting your colleagues . . . do you remember?

Sampley: Yes, I think this is Dr. Ballard's favorite poem, and I'll read it. It's "Oedipus Among the Academes" on page 35. I've always been fascinated by Oedipus because Oedipus was so sure that he was a good man, and when the word came that somebody was causing a plague in his country, why, he gave strict orders to search out this person and destroy him, whoever he might be--not, of course, having the least idea that he was the person he was talking about. It's really a poem about human fate, and you can think of Oedipus in terms of many people. I'm thinking of him here as a college professor, and college professors are

sometimes just as cocksure as Oedipus. They know it _all_. I'm suggesting that they, too, are subject to fate.

Oedipus Among the Academes

And so he comes to where the three roads
    meet.

The oracles now are universities:
Harvard, or Princeton, is an ancient seat.
Widener has the answers, I suppose.

I think his card was spindled at his birth.

If anyone can know the truth, he knows,
Has three degrees, a Fulbright, several books:
To reach this spot, he has gone round the
    earth.

Of course one can't avoid a clover leaf
On superhighways--that is, unless he looks
A mile or two beyond what he can see.

Some say he suffered from a hidden grief.

But there's no question of his pedigree:
You trace him back to Hegel, then to Kant,
All most respectable . . .
                                    it has to be
Timed as it is, because the thing is close.
If he had only got another grant,
He would be driving down some road in Greece.

He used to argue that men could increase
Their happiness by their intelligence,
That knowledge and a little common sense
Would create power that nothing could resist.
I thought that lecture was his masterpiece.

Somewhere there was a footnote that he missed.

Haggard: Well, this book, Selected Poems--you chose about twenty from your first three books and then added fifty-one new poems, so you're just sharing with us some of these.

Sampley: Yes, I have sometimes thought I was a little harsh on the person I was . . . for example, when I published my first book, I took only two poems out of that first book--I might have taken three or four more--but those were the two that I really wanted to keep. I'm quoting this from memory--and I may be wrong--but I believe I kept eight from my second book and twelve . . . now wait a minute . . . maybe ten from my third--something like that.

Haggard: "Furrow with Blackbirds."

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: That's an interesting poem. Did that happen to you--the birds coming?

Sampley: Oh, yes. I was not plowing in the field, but one of the things that I have noticed so many times in this country--and I'm sure you have, too--are the flocks of blackbirds that fly over in the autumn.

Haggard: Oh, yes. The grackles.

Sampley: Yes, yes. It's an interesting thing to me because they come over in the clouds, and they're always flying in the same direction. Not invariably, but predominantly, they are flying towards the southeast. They're flying from the northwest.

Haggard: In this poem there's so much imagery.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: And rhythm.

Sampley: And also a feeling of kinship between the man who is cultivating the furrows and the blackbirds who are flying over him. The man, too, would like to move along, to get away to something. They are seeking--I'm trying to say, I suppose--they are both seeking something which probably they will not find.

Haggard: Our time may be getting short, but is there one maybe "summing up" poem you'd like to do?

Sampley: I don't think of a poem that is a "summing up" poem, but one of my favorite poems--and I think this one might be a good one to conclude on--is a poem which won an annual prize for the Poetry Society of America. It suggests that the earth on which we live perhaps is eternal, whereas man, even though he may live for another

million years--and I hope he does--will eventually face the fading of the sun. At least this is what the scientists tell us--I don't know. That's out of my depth. But I'm taking the sea as an emblem of eternity here and I call the poem, "The Long Clock," the last poem in the book.

The sea is the long clock, spacing its
    tripped waves
Not as uncertain man with horologes
Uncertain as himself . . . the globe keeps

Surer pulse, earth cadence, time wash
Of its own motion . . . bells, dim bells
    at the dark rocks
Cradled and lethal, ringing requiems older

Than death itself and younger; time is not
    moments
Nor ticking of the clock nor of the fagged
    breast
Of futile, febrile, skipping man, but tidal

Swelling, insistent impulse, gathering inward
Filling the wombs of shores, poising and
    turning
Between the earth and moon on an algebraic

Jewel of lunar space; the sea is the sure clock
Where man, measuring eternity with his wrist
    watch
Hears for his little instant the long tolling.

Haggard: Oh, that's nice.

Sampley: Thank you. Well, I thought it was maybe the right poem to conclude with.

Haggard: And we'll conclude this interview, and thank you very much.

Oral History Collection

Dr. Arthur M. Sampley

Interviewer: Marguerite Haggard

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: May 29, 1974

Ms. Haggard: This is Marguerite Haggard interviewing Dr. Arthur M. Sampley at his home in Denton, Texas, on May 29, 1974, to reminisce with him about his roles as librarian and Director of the Department of Library Services during his tenure of those office, dating from 1944 to 1953 at North Texas State University, then North Texas State Teachers College, and after 1946, North Texas State College.

Dr. Sampley, you were a Professor of English at North Texas State Teachers College before you entered the Army Air Force. You returned to the college as Director of Libraries and Director of the Department of Library Service in 1944. Now could you tell us why you made the decision to change from teaching?

Dr. Sampley: Well, I suppose that was chance as much as anything else. I was in the Army Air Force in the training of pilots, and I was in the ground school, which is the beginning stage of it. In 1944 the Army foresaw--Army

Air Force foresaw--that they had, or were going to have, many more pilots than they would ever be able to use. They wanted to cut back on this training program, and they suggested that people who came in primarily as teachers in this program might apply for a return to civilian life.

I could see that there was going to be a surplus of officers, as indeed there was. I wrote to President McConnell and asked about the possibility of my coming back to North Texas if my position ceased to be. He wrote back that Dr. Hoole, who had been the Director of Libraries and Library Service at North Texas, had resigned to go to the University of Alabama and that he would like me to be the Director of Libraries. Well, I thought that over and decided that I would like that. I wrote to Dr. McConnell to that effect, and then when we had agreed, I put through my application for return to civilian life and was released in June of 1944.

Dr. McConnell told me that if I wanted to, I could take my library degree at North Texas State Teachers College. But I didn't feel that I wanted to do that, so I decided to go to Columbia University, which was one of the two or three leading library schools in the country at that time. Accordingly, on about the

first of July, 1944, I entered Columbia University, working toward the degree of Bachelor of Science in Library Service and completed my first summer's training about the end of August of that year. Then I assumed my duties as Director of Libraries and Library Service at North Texas State Teachers College in September, 1944.

Haggard: Did you realize when you considered the library position that you would be going to summer school?

Sampley: Yes, I did.

Haggard: And how many summers?

Sampley: I attended four summers.

Haggard: You didn't realize this. How did you feel about going back to school at the time? Do you remember how you felt?

Sampley: Well, I can say that the summer course was very intensive. I have never worked harder than I did the first summer term that I was at Columbia. However, learning has always been an interesting experience to me, and I'm glad that I had those four summers.

Haggard: I'd just like to comment here that you did very well because you graduated with high honors.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: So you did very well. Now let's go back to your association with Dr. McConnell. I judge he was instrumental

in getting you to become librarian. When did you first know Dr. McConnell?

Sampley: Well, I met him, of course, for the first time, as I recall--I may have met him earlier, but, if so, I have no recollection of it--when I came to North Texas as Professor of English in the Fall of 1935. I came, really, at the invitation of Professor Floyd Stovall, who was director of the Department of English and who had been a friend of mine at the University of Texas. Of course, after I came here I got to know President McConnell. As a matter of fact, President McConnell made an effort to know personally all of the people on his staff, and he entertained the new faculty in his home. My wife and I were his guests on more than one occasion. Then through the years I knew him at committee meetings of one kind or another. It was a gradual friendship which developed, I think, between us. I had a very high respect for him as a man and as an administrator.

Haggard: In 1945 in your publication Books, the fortnightly publication of the library, you had an editorial marking the 150,000th volume added to the library. You called that "A Book and A Man." It was a tribute to Dr. McConnell. You said he had the vision of a man who saw many years ago that the great educational institutions would have

to be built around a great library. So you made a tribute to President McConnell and knew him over a period of twenty years till his death in 1955.

Sampley: Well, yes. Yes, I did. That was certainly true. His concept of a college was that it must be built around a great library. This was only one of his visions for North Texas. He had a vision of a school of music, which later did develop. He had a vision of a school of business administration, which did develop. But he was interested in building a great library. He laid the foundations for it by his budgetary support and by his friendly interest in work for the library.

Haggard: That's interesting. Getting back to your early experiences as a librarian, can you recall some of the problems of the library when you came that pertain to the building or the book collections, documents, periodicals, the courses in library service, and any other problems?

Sampley: The most immediate problem that I faced when I took over the library was a staff problem. Dr. Hoole had taken with him to the University of Alabama two of the best members of the library staff--the cataloguer and the periodicals librarian. I had the problem of finding replacements at a time when I did not know very many people in the library profession. Fortunately, I had

good advice, and, fortunately, we had a library school which trained librarians. We were able to fill those places. That was, and continued to be, a problem.

It was a problem not only for our library, but for other libraries, because at that time not enough librarians were being trained. Many of them were in the military services, and the pay for librarians was very low. In retrospect it seems to me scandalously low, but I am probably thinking in current financial terms. For example, we could offer a prospective cataloguer $2,200 for twelve months work. We were competing with . . . pretty soon we were competing with better salaries in the public schools than we could offer in the college. That, I think, was the most serious problem that I faced immediately.

As times developed, of course, we had the problem which every growing library faces of space to put books. We were able to solve that problem by adding new shelf room, but that, of course, took a good deal of time. I should say the biggest problem I had to face was replacement of personnel.

Haggard: You said in this editorial of March 1, 1945, that the growth of a library was the faithful and loyal service of the library staff from the very foundation. That very foundation, I guess, was Mrs. McCracken.

Sampley: That's right.

Haggard: So your library staff . . . enlisting and having a trained library staff was a big part of your job, and the success of a library depended on that.

Sampley: I think that that is the main job of a director of libraries--and I'm sure Dr. Webb would bear me out in this--is building a good staff and in keeping the morale as high as possible.

We had also, of course, the problem, which I think is not so much of a problem now, in that much of the work in our library was done by student assistants. The turnover among student assistants is always high because they're always graduating. Part of my job was interviewing prospective student assistants and finding the right place for them in the library. I may say that my experience was that the student assistants do excellent work, and they made the library a serviceable and a cheerful place for the people who came there.

Haggard: Considering the historical development of the library and considering the office of the head librarian, you occupy a unique place. You were the third librarian. In 1903, Mrs. McCracken was the first designated librarian. Dr. Hoole was second. And then you knew Dr. Webb. You were an important bridge in the roster of libraries and in an important

period of transition from the Teachers College to college and university status. Could you review your impressions of Mrs. McCracken, that veteran librarian, because you have known these librarians?

Sampley: Yes, I have known them all well. I remember Mrs. McCracken, of course, from the time I came to North Texas. She was a very pleasant lady, made one feel welcome in the library. She had built up a good library staff. She worked, when I came, under very difficult conditions because the library occupied about half of what is now the Historical Museum Building. It's not a large building, and the library had only half the space in it. I was impressed by how well the library staff did under those quite difficult conditions. A new library was completed in 1937.

I'm not quite sure what year Dr. Hoole came, but it was shortly after the completion of the new library building. Dr. Hoole was a very intelligent and energetic person. His energy took the form of writing book reviews and articles and later, books. He had a vision of building the collection at North Texas. He worked energetically at that. He had set the pattern for the North Texas Regional Union List of Serials and really had started the library on a good sound course. He would have made a distinguished librarian for

us, but he felt that he had a wider field in going to the University of Alabama as librarian, which he did in 1944.

Haggard: I wanted to ask why he did leave. That answers that. When he replaced Mrs. McCracken, how do you think Mrs. McCracken or any librarian would be prepared to be replaced after such a long and distinguished service?

Sampley: Well, I didn't know Mrs. McCracken well enough to answer that question. But I saw her a good many times just in a social way. She was a friend of my wife and me. When we were in her home, she always seemed to be happy and contented. By that time, of course, I think she was quite an elderly person. I don't know if that would be . . .

Haggard: That's the answer. As age came on, she was ready to relinquish her duties of head librarian.

Sampley: Now as to my acquaintance with Dr. Webb, I knew Dr. Webb through associations in the Texas Library Association. I can still remember the first time I met him when the Texas Library Association met in Houston. One of the meetings was at Rice University. He was associate librarian there. I was very much impressed by his personality and his knowledgeability. He went from there to the University of Chicago to work on his doctor's degree and was working on his doctor's degree and teaching some work in the

library school at the University of Chicago at the time when I was made Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in June of 1953.

President Matthews consulted with me about a successor. My first recommendation was David Webb. I didn't know whether we could attract him here or not. But it turned out that he was interested in the position and did accept it. I think he has made an outstanding librarian.

Haggard: That's very interesting. I wonder if I can ask here how you could again make a decision to leave this library you loved and become the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Sampley: Well, I made it with some reservations. I had enjoyed my work in the library, and I had many friends in the library profession. But it seemed an opportunity for wider service. I don't know that it was, but it seemed so at the time.

Haggard: Again, you have the view of the whole college.

Sampley: Yes, I suppose so. And it was something new to do. It was a new endeavor.

Haggard: While we are talking about librarians and the library building, do you have any memory of the PWA (Public Works Administration) being involved in the building?

Sampley: Well, of course, at that time I was a Professor of English and interested in the library mainly from what it could offer me in that area. But I was, of course, very happy when we were able to get a library building suitable to the size and needs of the college. The old building was hopelessly inadequate. The new building was quite adequate for the time when it was constructed and remained so for as long as I was associated with it. I must say, though, that when the enrollment began to increase as it did in the early '50's, the library became crowded, particularly the reference and reserve sections.

Haggard: You were still in the administration of the college when remodeling and enlargement was done. Do you know if plans the original architect had made for the enlargement of the college was used or anything about that part of the operation?

Sampley: I don't think we had any overall plan at that time. We had to improvise. At the present time, the university is able to plan for the future, but we, at that time, had to depend on the legislature for appropriations for the buildings, and the legislature was rather reluctant to make such appropriations. We were desperately in need for stack room in 1949, and 1950 we began the construction of the new stack room. This was completed in 1951. That

made space for an additional 175,000 volumes which was certainly adequate for the time that I was there and remained adequate for, oh, I auppose, seven or eight years. But then it became quite inadequate, and the new library building was constructed. That, of course, was long after my time.

Haggard: That's interesting because those stacks were dedicated in 1951, when . . . I believe it was in March of 1952, when Dr. Matthews was formally installed as President, and then they were honoring Dr. McConnell as the emeritus president, and they dedicated five buildings and the stacks. So that was very important.

Sampley: Yes, indeed, it was. I don't recall exactly how the university came into that sum of money. I suppose it was an appropriation from the legislature. But the university tried to divide it up among the departments that needed space. The library was certainly one of the divisions that needed space.

Haggard: Now let's continue with the growth of the library as to the library itself. The number of libraries . . . a library is a collection of libraries just as the Bible is a collection of books. During your administration new libraries were added, and new librarians. Can you tell us . . . can you remember some of these that were added?

Sampley: I would say that by far the biggest addition occurred in the number of libraries, or divisions of the library, when I was in charge was our becoming a United States government depository in 1948. This meant, of course, that we had to bring in a librarian who would be in charge of this work. The first one was Miss Pauline Ward. When she left, the work was transferred to Mrs. Velma Cathey, who recently retired. This collection has grown and become one of the big units in the library. Another collection which was in existence when I was in the library but was divided--part of it was in the library, and part of it was in the music building--is the music library, which has been primarily consolidated into the main library as it was when I was in charge. It became so important that we added an assistant music librarian. This was, of course, in keeping with the growth of the School of Music, which is one of the outstanding divisions of North Texas State University as it is now constituted.

Haggard: And then you had a growth of non-book collections.

Sampley: Yes, there were many non-book collections. Of course, the music library had many phonograph records. We had, also, film strips, slides, and materials of that sort which were useful for instructors to take to their classes.

One of the developments which came in my time and has revolutionized some phases of library work is the

development of microfilm. Before microfilms were generally available, we had to keep all of our newspapers bound. Those that were not printed on paper with rag content, and the only ones that I know of that kind were the New York Times volumes, deteriorated rapidly. Such volumes were tremendous storage problems. These files are now available on microfilm and can be stored in a very small space and read on microfilm readers. That program was inaugurated while I was librarian and has grown tremendously. It has also made possible the acquisition of rare books and files of periodicals, materials which would not be available to most libraries without tremendous cost. So that sort of non-book materials has become increasingly important through the years.

Haggard: This brings us on to the growth of the book collection because you have room now for books with these various innovations. The growth from 88,000 volumes in 1939 when Dr. Hoole came to 150,000 volumes in 1945 is tremendous. I'm wondering how these . . . by what means are the most books collected? I know that grants and gifts and these depository appointments are all responsible. Can you tell us by what means most of these books . . .

Sampley: Well, I would say that probably between 90 and 95 per cent of the books that are in the library were purchased with

college funds. Each year the President would notify the Director of Libraries how much money he would have for the purchase of books and periodicals. We did receive certain gifts, and the largest one that ever came while I was in the library was a gift from the General Education Fund for $5,000 for the acquisition of back files of periodicals. But the great bulk of the material was purchased from college funds.

Now this created a problem. How do you divide funds among the departments in the university because each department gets its share? At my suggestion President McConnell in 1945--that was in the first year that I was librarian--appointed a committee of five at that time who met and allocated the funds among the departments. Each departmental director was notified as to the funds which would be available for his department. A certain proportion, which I have forgotten, was allocated to a general fund for the acquisition of reference books and periodicals, certain general periodicals which didn't fit in any department.

The selection of the materials from the general fund was done primarily by Miss Brashiers and me. Miss Brashiers was reference librarian and later became associate librarian. She and I studied book lists and

book catalogues and made recommendations. Then each department made its recommendations. These were all filtered through the order librarian who tried to avoid any duplication of ordering.

Haggard: I read where you stated that many of the good library books were the midnight work of a faculty member digging into catalogues and digging into his needs. You gave the credit. You said the success of the library was the combined intellectual efforts of the staff and the faculty.

Sampley: That undoubtedly was true. Each faculty member who is intellectually alert has an interest in books in his field of work. Professor Stovall, I'll use as an example. He was a Whitman specialist, but he also had interests in all areas of American literature. He studied secondhand catalogues and sent us book orders continually. I'm simply using him as one example. Now there were hundreds of others.

Haggard: Now Dr. Sampley, I know that the development of the School of Librarianship was a very primary interest of yours during your administration. In 1939, Dr. Hoole . . . there was a complete Department of Library Service, and 109 students were in the department in the summer of 1945. Then it was 258 in the summer of 1949. This shows great growth. And

we know the origin and the beginnings and the development of this Department of Library Service because they've been documented well by the students and their research. You can read about it. But that name of Mrs. George Medders, known as "Lady Kate," is so prominent in the development of this program of school librarianship. I'm going to ask you if you can tell us what characterized her leadership?

Sampley: Mrs. Medders was a very remarkable person. She had a kind of missionary attitude towards library service, and she especially liked to stress service. It was her view that librarians existed to make it easy for people to get books and to enjoy them. This enthusiasm for service she communicated to her students. It undoubtedly was a very strong factor in the success of the School of Library Service. All the people that came under the influence of Mrs. Medders felt this enthusiasm, and she left her mark on the students that she taught. When I came, I think that she and Miss Thomas were the only two teachers in the department. My memory may be at fault about that, but that's the way I recall it. Miss Thomas taught courses in reference and cataloguing, and Mrs. Medders taught the school library courses.

Haggard: This is one big division of the librarian's job because you are the Director of the School of Library Service.

Sampley: Yes, that was an important assignment. And I taught a course in library service once a year for the first two or three years, and then I gave it up. We were fortunate in that our school was recognized by the State Department of Education as the foremost school in the training of school librarians. We were just training more such people than any other institution in Texas. That, I suppose, was the reason that we were chosen to give the library workshop program in 1947, as I recall, and again in 1948.

The 1947 program was the most important because the state department gave twenty fifty-dollar scholarships to recognized school librarians from all over Texas. These school librarians came together and drew up two manuals. One was a manual of practices for school librarians. That isn't the exact title. It's something like that. The other was a booklist for school librarians. I think the title was _Books for Boys and Girls_. That came out of the 1947 workshop which was taught by Miss Eleanora Alexander of Houston, who was in charge of the library work in Houston public schools. Miss Mattie Ruth Moore, who was on loan from the Dallas public schools to the Texas Education Agency, was a consultant for this program. That was an outstanding workshop. It was followed by another the next year.

I think that those two workshops made an important contribution.

Haggard: I'm sure they did, too. I believe in this next workshop you were also working in cooperation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: And you worked in standards for our accreditation. I mean, these things really carried their weight in the development of the school libraries in Texas. And then you worked on guidance the next year--reading guidance.

Sampley: Well, yes, we were working in cooperation with the Texas Education Agency and the Southern Association. The Southern Association felt that there were not enough properly trained librarians available to meet the needs of the public schools. They were interested in our program because we seemed to be preparing such librarians. I think those two workshops did make a contribution in that area.

Haggard: And this cooperation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools along with the state agencies--the general board and the educational agencies--was one big step or one great effort of cooperation, was it not?

Sampley: Yes, yes, I think it was.

Haggard: Now this was . . . these activities . . . the workshops and these activities in the development of the school librarianship was originated in your administration. And another activity in this development were the clinics, these clinics that were continued from Dr. Hoole's administration. You continued them. Why did you continue them, Dr. Sampley? They were just several days at the beginning of the summer. Why did you feel they were important enough to continue?

Sampley: Well, the library clinic served several purposes, as I saw it. Perhaps the most important purpose was that it was a kind of reunion of our graduates. They liked to come back to attend the clinic and just meet their friends and their teachers and also to get a refreshment of their professional training. We always had a school librarian who dealt with some phase of school library work.

As I saw it, there was another contribution to be made. Perhaps my own interest did affect the choice of speakers. I have a feeling that librarians and writers should have, to say the least, a friendly relation. I had the feeling then and I have the feeling now that Texas has been backward in the production of literature. It will not compare, for example, with California, certainly with New York, probably not with North Carolina, in the

production of literature. I felt that librarians could encourage writers. And so insofar as I had any effect on the choice . . . and the choice was always made by the department. We had departmental meetings. But I think the department agreed with me about this. We invited such people as J. Frank Dobie, John A. Lomax, Roy Bedichek, Harnett Kane, Walter Prescott Webb. All of these people came and talked to our clinic. They were distinguished figures in Texas literature. Maybe we gave them some encouragement. Certainly we learned something from them.

Haggard: Yes, the strong flavor of Texas came . . . and those themes, I wondered how they were chosen, and you have answered that question very well. I think here it's well to remember that you yourself had a literary career paralleling your college career and that you were active in literary organizations and possibly knew these men firsthand.

Sampley: Yes, I did. It so happened that I was a member of the Texas Institute of Letters, where I got personally acquainted with all of these people. Some of them, of course, I had known when I was an instructor from the University of Texas, 1925-1928. But I hadn't known them well because I was just a young instructor. But I did know them through the Texas Institute of Letters, of which I was a member.

Haggard: And you served on committees, and then you served offices that . . . you served as president twice.

Sampley: Yes, I served as president of Texas Institute of Letters. As a matter of fact, I was president for three years. Though in 1942 the Institute was not very significant. It did become an important organization when Carr P. Collins offered $1,000 for the best Texas book. The Institute suddenly became important. I was president of it in 1952 and 1953.

Haggard: Well, It's interesting to see how these librarians met these authors, and then they took them to the library and to the school children of Texas. I think it had a tremendous effect of making literature real. It was a real contribution, Dr. Sampley. Do you have any memories of any personal incidents concerning these men, or maybe some personal quality of these men that you would like to share--somebody that impressed you or that you appreciated especially?

Sampley: Well, of course, there is one little amusing incident I knew while Mr. Lomax . . . I got to know him fairly well. He had a birthday party in Dallas and invited me over. His doctor came and brought him a basket of fruit. The doctor said, "There's a motive in this presentation because you're eating too much carbohydrates and you need to eat

more fruit." It wasn't long after that till Mr. Lomax, who was then an old man, passed away.

Haggard: Yes, he spoke in 1947 at your clinic on "The Adventures of a Ballad Hunter." So you were lucky to have had him and shared him. Did you know Frank Dobie?

Sampley: Oh, yes. I had . . . I knew Mr. Dobie when I was an instructor at the University of Texas. Then, of course, I got to know him much better and was at his home at Austin on one or two occasions. Mr. Dobie was, I think, the most colorful person we had in Texas literature. Whatever views he had, he had very strongly. Many people thought that he had them too strongly. But whatever you thought of Mr. Dobie, he was very forthright and very clear about what he felt and thought.

Haggard: Yes, you had him here in 1950 for "The Making and the Makings of One Book." You had Dr. Webb for the last clinic you were responsible for.

Sampley: Yes, and I suppose that wasn't very long before his death. Dr. Webb, of course, was a very distinguished historian, a very thoughtful man, a man of ideas. I, too, had known . . . I mean, I had known him, too, when I was at the University of Texas. Of course, I hadn't known him well, but I was tremendously impressed by his threads of thought.

Haggard: I think your clinics were very interesting and very fruitful for the librarians and the children of Texas. Dr. Sampley, in your administration you were very interested in the movement of the cooperation among the college and city libraries of the region. The North Texas Union List of Union Serials was one of your projects. Can you tell us something about it?

Sampley: Yes, this project was originally suggested by Dr. Kuhlman, who was the director of Joint Universities Libraries in Atlanta. He visited this area and made a recommendation that the four college and university libraries in this area--SMU, TCU, Texas State College for Women as it was then, and North Texas State Teachers College as it was then--together with the Dallas Public Library, the Fort Worth Public Library, and the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Library should engage in a joint project to build up the serial resources of this area. By serial, I mean periodical and annuals. It is a great advantage to be able to go into a library and find a complete file of a serial that you may be interested in. He made the recommendation which was adopted by the four university presidents and by the two public libraries and by the seminary. This was carried out in the first North Texas Regional Union List of Serials, which was edited by Dr. Stanley Hoole in 1943.

When I became Librarian, this work was carried on. The other libraries sent in their holdings to us. These were combined by our order librarian, Miss Louise Evans. A supplement was issued in 1945, and another supplement was issued in 1946. Then in 1948, Miss Evans and I edited a second edition of the North Texas Regional Union list of Serials. In the meantime, the General Education Board had given to each of the university and college libraries a grant of $5,000 each to be matched by a similar grant from each institution. This money was to be used for the acquisition of serials which no other library in the region held. North Texas spent, then, approximately $10,000--$5,000 from the General Education Board, $5,000 from college funds--in acquisition of these serials. Each of the other institutions did the same.

Now this resulted in the acquisition of files of serials which were not duplicated elsewhere in the region. It wasn't easy always to find what we were looking for. We had the money, but we were not always able to find these publications on the market, and it required a great deal of searching in secondhand catalogues. I remember that I had a visitor from Holland who was a book salesman visiting me and the other libraries in the area because he had some of these books. Now I remember him because he

called at my home and was impressed by the picture on my wall of "The View of the Delft," which is a famous painting by Vetmeet, who was a native of Holland. The city of Delft is, of course, in Holland. At any rate, this project undoubtedly increased the library resources of the region.

It became, however, too cumbersome to keep up. My information is that the project has ceased to exist. Some by-products, however, remain. The $40,000 that was spent for non-duplicated material is there in the libraries. Also, at the recommendation of Dr. Kuhlman, students from North Texas use the library at TWU, and students from TWU use the library at North Texas. That has been done since the original visit of Dr. Kuhlman, and I regard it as one of the important by-products of this project.

Haggard: That's interesting. So since 1948 it has not been re-edited.

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: But it is still there for extended use.

Sampley: The materials are there.

Haggard: That's interesting. Now I think that closely allied with the activities of the library are the associations you had with professional libraries. You still have to remember that you as a literary man had literary associations at the same time, and then you had your personal associations.

Let's review some of them and why . . . I know this took a great deal of time to attend meetings and make speeches and accept offices. Why were you active in these associations?

Sampley: There were two reasons. One, I suppose, is a selfish one, and that is I enjoyed them. I enjoyed the association with people who had the same interests that I did. I liked to attend these meetings. I always learned something there. The other reason, I think, was not purely unselfish, but I believe that it did make the public a little more acquainted with the North Texas State University, and I know that it is the policy, and has always been the policy of the university, to encourage their staff people to attend professional meetings, to represent the university, to read papers, and to be active in the professional life of the group with which they're associated. Now this is a part of the process of promoting the development of learning and skills as they apply to colleges and universities.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, continuing our conversation about your professional associations with the American Library Association, the Southwestern Association, Southeastern . . .

Sampley: No, Southwestern.

Haggard: And Southeastern, also?

Sampley: I don't recall Southeastern.

Haggard: And then the Texas Library Association and then the Library Division of the Texas Teachers Association. You were active in all of those. You had speeches to give. You served on chairmanships and held office in the Texas Library Association. You mentioned that you were president of it in 1949. How did you have time to do all of these activities pertaining to these associations?

Sampley: Well, I had a certain amount of time, I suppose, in my office. It's hard for me to remember. I did so many things. I interviewed staff members. I interviewed prospective student help. I met with members of the Department of Library Service, and I spent a great deal of time in book selection. But I did have a certain amount of time in my office for writing speeches and studying.

But there was another thing that I've almost forgotten and it's true. I had my evenings at home to work in, and I did a good deal of work in the evenings. I also had not only a secretary in my office, but I also had a secretary at hime. My wife typed a good many of

the letters, and certainly she did almost all of typing of the hundreds of letters that I sent in connection with my work as president of the Texas Institute of Letters. I did not do that on library time. I did it at home, and my wife typed the letters at home. So I not only worked a little overtime myself, but my wife did a good deal of overtime work for which she had no compensation at all that I know of.

Haggard: Well, I imagine she did get satisfaction in helping you, and I'd like to say here that Mrs. Sampley did become a librarian and got her library degree from the North Texas school during the time you were serving, but she became a full-fledged librarian, did she not?

Sampley: Yes, my wife was a--and I'm speaking of my first wife--very well-educated woman. She had a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas with Phi Beta Kappa honors, master's degree from the University of Texas, and then, as you say, she took a degree in library service at North Texas State University.

Haggard: And was reference librarian.

Sampley: She served as reference librarian when I was on leave attending Columbia University. She did that two summers. We were never on the university payroll at the same time. But in the summer of 1945 and the summer of 1946, she did

serve as reference librarian. While, in my absence, Miss Lottie Brashiers, who was reference librarian, served as head librarian.

Haggard: I want to ask this question at this time. Did you ever have to miss the clinics? The workshops were after you finished.

Sampley: I do not recall that I missed any clinics.

Haggard: You finished them before you went.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: That's interesting. Now back to these associations. As a literary man, your literary career was well under way when you came to the library. You had membership in the Texas Poetry Society and the Institute of Letters and possibly others. And you were very . . . you had speeches to make, papers to write, and the chairmanships that you filled. Let's review. You were president twice of the Institute of Letters, and then you were Poet Laureate of the State of Texas in 1951 to 1953. How did you manage all of these activities again?

Sampley: Well, I would say that the years from 1951 to 1953 were very busy years because I did, as Poet Laureate--and this was with the understanding and approval of President McConnell--I did speak to a good many groups. Some of them were librarians, and some of them were Texas women's

clubs. I had to carry on, as I said, by correspondence with the Texas Institute of Letters. That involved a good deal of work. I had a very extensive pile of correspondence in getting speakers, writing to the counselors to arrange meetings and all of that sort of thing. I suppose that those years were among the busiest of my life. But, of course, my health was fairly good. And as I have said, I had the help of my wife who typed all my correspondence for the Texas Institute of Letters.

Haggard: And you were publishing poetry at this time, too, and had those awards from the Institute of Letters.

Sampley: Well, I was publishing, but I didn't do very much writing in those few years because I just didn't have time.

Haggard: Well, I wanted to ask how, as a literary man, did the library job affect your works? Were you encouraged or discouraged in writing, in creating?

Sampley: Well, I think that the library position was favorable for the development of my writing because it freed me from . . . I had had, as I thought, too much of an interest in Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama. I think it's bad for a writer to have too much interest in one area. I got away from that, and as a librarian I had a wide variety of interests. I was able to read in modern literature and modern poets. I'm sure this . . .

Haggard: And you were making your first talks on the modern poets, and you stayed with them for twenty years.

Sampley: I changed my field of interest from what it had been to modern poetry. I'm sure that this was an advantage for me.

Haggard: That's interesting. In 1953 you accepted the deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences. Have I asked . . . I did ask how you could make this decision from this world of books that you loved.

Sampley: Well, I remember saying at the time that I suppose that one of the reasons I may have been offered the job as Dean of Arts and Sciences was that I had some recognition as a writer--not a great deal, but some. So the recognition which I had as a writer was probably going to end my literary career because I didn't really see how a dean could be a poet, and I still don't see.

Haggard: You were the dean for a short time.

Sampley: I was a dean actually for five months, I think.

Haggard: And then you moved up to be the second vice-president of the college.

Sampley: Yes, I became Dean of Arts and Sciences in June of 1953. In November of 1953, I became vice-president. At that time there was only one vice-president. Others were added later, and my final title was Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

Haggard: Well, that's the opening of a new chapter, and we might go back and close the library chapter by asking if you have any philosophy or concept of librarianship that you would like to share with us.

Sampley: Well, I have, of course, a rather special attitude towards libraries. Libraries contain the wisdom and the knowledge of the past ages. If you can imagine a situation where most of the world were to be wiped out . . . and I think in our time of the atomic bomb we can at least imagine a situation, though we pray it may never happen. If you had one library left, one good library left, you could start all over. You could, by using the stored up knowledge, the stored up wisdom, you could build your civilization all over again and build on top of it because the library stores the knowledge of the past and the wisdom of the past and the experience of the past. But that knowledge is inert until it touches human lives. That's the role of the librarian--to make it easy for human beings to come in touch with this knowledge, this science, wisdom of the past, and open up new avenues to build on what we already know.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, I think that's an excellent conclusion to your memoirs in the role of being librarian of North Texas State University.

Oral History Collection

Dr. Arthur M. Sampley

Interviewer: Marguerite Haggard

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas Date: November 26, 1974

Ms. Haggard: This is Marguerite Haggard interviewing Dr. Arthur M. Sampley at his home in Denton, Texas, on November 26, 1974. This fourth and concluding interview with Dr. Sampley will be in two parts. The first will deal with his tenure of office as vice-president of North Texas State College and his resignation from that office in 1959 to return to his teaching profession. Part two could be titled "Dr. Sampley: Distinguished Professor of English." It will touch on the scope, highlights, and insights of Dr. Sampley's long career as a teacher of English.

Dr. Sampley, as we reminisce about your role--the role you played during the tenure of your office of vice-president of North Texas State College from 1953 to 1969--we'll be talking about your duties and the problems and accomplishments during this time. I wonder if I can ask you a question before we begin.

Dr. Sampley: Yes.

Ms. Haggard: You accepted this position in November, 1959, after having . . .

Sampley: 1953.

Haggard: 1953, pardon me. You were Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in June of that year. Could you tell us why you were willing to accept this new and more arduous position?

Sampley: I accepted it with some hesitation because I realized that a position of that sort involved responsibilities--and I would say worries--that the dean did not have. I thought that it was an opportunity for wider service. I suppose that was the reason I accepted it, although I was not, from the very beginning, enthusiastic about it.

Haggard: Well, you've had a great many accomplishments. Let's talk about some of these. Let's talk about your duties. What was the primary duty of this office?

Sampley: Well, I was responsible, along with the deans and the Faculty Council, for seeing that the academic requirements were enforced equally and fairly for all students and that the different schools of the university kept together in the requirements which they made on their students.

Haggard: How were these standards set?

Sampley: The standards, of course, were set in college catalogue. When I came into the office, I inherited the standards which had been set by my predecessors. The changes which

were made under my administration were made by the Faculty Council, which consisted of the deans of the colleges, the dean of men, women, and six elected members from the faculty at-large. Later on when Air Force ROTC was added, the Air Force colonel was also a member of this council.

Haggard: This is a council that was formed in the middle forties when the school was being re-organized . . . this Faculty Council. I'd like to go back and ask those standards. You said they were set forth in the college catalogue. Who had set these up? A previous Faculty Council?

Sampley: I presume so; I never asked (chuckle).

Haggard: You were concerned with . . .

Sampley: I was simply concerned with what was in the catalogue.

Haggard: Well, now these standards that you changed, tell us about the changes you made. Did you actually . . . you didn't actually work with the students. You worked with the heads . . . the deans of the schools to keep these standards up.

Sampley: That's right. Well, every degree plan with a problem came across my desk. My secretary tried to see all degree plans of graduating seniors as early as possible. If there were some difficulty in a degree plan, we called

the student in and tried to work out a way in which this student could clear himself for graduation.

Haggard: Were there many of these?

Sampley: Not very many. Sometimes a student might be short, for example, a semester hour. We were able, then, to let the student register for that hour by correspondence or take it in some other way so that he would meet the graduation requirements.

Haggard: Since the student body had increased three times since the middle thirties, this was a big job itself.

Sampley: It was a pretty big job. I understand that all of that work is now done by the deans, that the academic vice-president no longer has that responsibility.

Haggard: Well, now back to your standards that you changed. Tell us about those.

Sampley: Well . . .

Haggard: You maintained the academic standards, and you worked with the deans, but you made this change. What was it?

Sampley: Well, there were two general kinds of changes which the Faculty Council made. They had to approve all new courses which were proposed. Those courses had to clear through the Faculty Council. At the time I was vice-president, we could not have any new degree programs so far as I

recall. This is from my memory. But we did add new courses. We were permitted to do that.

Then through a committee, through the recommendations of a committee to the Faculty Council, we changed twice, I think, while I was vice-president, the minimum academic standards which the student had to maintain in order to stay in school. One of these changes made it easier for the students, and one made it harder. The one that made it harder was that we inaugurated a requirement that a student must pass at least six hours of work if he were carrying a regular load. He must pass at least six hours of work, or he would automatically be out at the beginning of the next semester. The way in which we made the standards more flexible, and I think easier for the student, was if a student had a backlog of grade points and hours that he had to make up, he could attend summer school and make up hours and grade points. However, he always had to pass the minimum of requirement for his classification. Those were set down in the catalogue, and those were not changed while I was vice-president.

Haggard: Now you were also chairman of the committee of Who's Who Among American University and College Students.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: What did this chairmanship involve?

Sampley: Well, the student regarded this as one of the highest honors to come to a student. They took this honor very seriously. The committee consisted of certain members of the faculty, as I recall, the dean of men and the dean of women and the students who had previously made Who's Who. The students on the committee outnumbered the faculty. We worked together in trying to draw up a point system so that a student might qualify on the basis of points. He would get so many points for being president of the student body, so many points for being the captain of the football team. We had a very elaborate system. As it worked out, we were nominating more girls than boys, and so we modified the system so that we would have an equal number of boys and girls in our nominations. The final choices were made by vote of the members of the committee. As I say, the majority of the members were students.

Haggard: Dr. Sampley, while we are in the area of the Faculty Council and Who's Who Committee, I wanted to ask you a question. In 1952 when there was an Institutional Self-Study, there was some limitation reported in the committee, and they were concerned with the lack of communication among the staff members. Did you see that happening? Did you . . . you said that the communication

both vertically and horizontally had a deficiency. Did you see this beginning to come as the faculty increased?

Sampley: I saw this problem, yes. As the institution grew larger, I realized that there was a definite problem of communication. It was my feeling that there should be more elected members on the Faculty Council. I talked that over with President Matthews, and he did not agree with me. So his judgement outweighed mine. I think that problem became rather acute in the 1960's.

Haggard: You took care of this when you were Director of Libraries with your publications, the fortnightly publication, North Texas Books, because you had not communicated with them what you were doing and your needs of them. Is that right?

Sampley: Yes, that was, I hoped, a communication with the faculty. I think the most important thing I inaugurated in communication was the Library Committee, which had not existed before. This was a committee that was chosen. I don't recall the exact method of choosing, but each department in turn would get its turn to have a member on the Library Committee, and the Library Committee set the budget for buying books. This, I think, was a forward step because the faculty then felt they had a choice in the matter.

Haggard: So this communication . . . that's just an example showing it can be worked out departmentally. Now another limitation reported was concerning the students' educational

program. They thought there was insufficient evidence available to analyze students' success and that there was little information reported on the national standing of this university student. Who's Who doesn't take care of that?

Sampley: Well, this is Dr. Rogers' comment. I really don't know what was meant by that. This may be quoting from some visiting committee.

Haggard: It's a self-study analysis.

Sampley: Yes, that's right.

Haggard: After the school was made a university in '61, there was an Institutional Self-Study for the Commission on Colleges and Universities of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: So I just wanted to ask if you saw these things coming, or if you saw this . . . and there was also a report that there was no formal university-wide program providing for the superior students.

Sampley: Well, of course, we discussed from time to time an honors program. I don't know that we ever seriously considered that. My own feeling was that we needed more guiding and counseling for students. We had some, but I didn't think

it was enough. I know that they have a much better program in that area now.

Haggard: But we have to remember that this time was a great time of change and growth. In 1949, North Texas became a state college, and this is just four years before you took office. And then in two years after you left in 1961, university status was given. Dr. Rogers in the Story of North Texas called your time "The making of the University" because the university was being formed.

Sampley: Well, we had a period of steady growth and enrollment. It was not a spectacular in any one year, but it was steady. We were developing the programs which had been approved for the institution. I think that did help to lay the background for the expansion into a university which did occur in the 1960's.

Haggard: Well, one of your duties was chairman of the College Bulletins Committee. Now this kept your fingers right on all of the programs because you printed what would be offered in the bulletins. It was at this time . . . I mean, 1951, there had been that legislative freeze on course expansion.

Sampley: Yes, that was in 1951. There was a time before I became vice-president when no new courses could be added. The legislature eased up on that and permitted us to add

courses on a limited basis, but not programs. Later on, they set up the coordinating board--the Commission on Higher Education. New programs could be approved by this commission. The only program that I recall--I could be wrong about this--the only program that I recall that was added during my administration was the ROTC program.

Haggard: Yes, in the middle of your tenure, this Texas Commission on Higher Education was formed, and when there had been a temporary commission, Dr. Matthews had headed that in '55 before it was formed in '56. A lot of problems were ironed out by this Commission on Higher Education. Did that affect your work in any way? Of course, it was to make formulas for appropriations requests and reporting systems.

Sampley: I was always very careful to clear with President Matthews what authority we had in setting up new course offerings. I know that we were quite cautious about doing this to begin with, but later on we were able to do it more freely.

Haggard: Now as to some of the other memberships you had as vice-president, you were a member of the Fine Arts Committee and the Athletic Committee and the Student Publications Committee.

Sampley: Yes, I was simply a member of those committees--a voting member. I had no more than any other member to do with the decisions. I recall that the Athletic Committee did wrestle with the problem that they are still wrestling with. My recollection is that when I became a member of the Athletic Committee, North Texas was independent and not a member of any athletic conference. It was during my membership on the Athletic Committee that we joined the Missouri Valley Conference. I had very little to do with those decisions, except I was involved in the discussion and the debate.

Haggard: That's what I wanted you to tell. That was a memorable change in a polich or innovation. Were there any fine arts accomplishments that were outstanding that you'd like to remember?

Sampley: No, the Fine Arts Committee had been, and I presume it has now, a certain sum of money to disperse. There was always a problem of how much of this will go to plays, how much will go to music, how much will go to lectures. The committee struggled with this and tried to be fair and equal in dividing out the funds that were available. I remember that we had a settled policy then of always inviting the Dallas Symphony Orchestra to give a performance at North Texas. That was one of the musical events.

Haggard: Yes.

Sampley: Of course, the representative from the School of Music would recommend music programs. The representative from the School of Drama would recommend a play. The committee, then, had to make the final choices. There were students, also, on the committee. It was a faculty-student committee.

Haggard: That's interesting. You know, this is a far cry from the beginnings. The fine arts program was in the hands of students. It was extra-curricular. The faculty and school did not sponsor these in the very beginning of this college. So this is a step. There was an opera workshop here during your tenure, too.

Sampley: Yes, that's true.

Haggard: Now are there other facets of this job where you were called to attend dinners or speeches or such?

Sampley: Well, when I became vice-president, the president told me that one of the duties of vice-president was to attend functions that the president could not or did not want to attend. Therefore, I did attend a good many dinners, and I tried to attend all fine arts programs and as many music and theater programs as I was able to.

Haggard: Thinking about the changes that must have taken place during these important six years, was any change greater than integration after the Supreme Court ruling on the case of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954?

Sampley: This was a very important decision. I did not have a great deal to do with it, but I accompanied President Matthews to the federal court in Sherman when North Texas was sued, I think, by some colored student who wished to enter. At that time President Matthews presented a program of gradual integration which he thought would make the transition easier. But the court ruled that the integration had to be complete, so we immediately had black students on the campus.

This did not create problems. The students accepted the black students with no furor or disturbance. The television people from Dallas were over trying to find something that they could make a good story about, but it didn't develop. The change, I think, was made easily. But, of course, there were problems which I did not have much to do with. But I know there were problems that gradually had to be worked out. These were largely worked out by President Matthews and Dean Woods and Dean Bentley--Dean of Men and the Dean of Women. You can see that they would have the chief problems.

Haggard: Yes. I don't guess you had enough student body--colored student body--to affect the academic standards in the time you were there.

Sampley: We made no changes at all in the academic standards. The students--the colored students--simply had to meet the

standards of the white students. If they met them, well and good. If they didn't, we didn't distinguish between black and white. There were black and white students who failed, and there were black and white students who succeeded.

Haggard: I had questions to ask you about this integration, and you've answered them all in your discussion. Do you have any one thing that gave you the greatest sense of satisfaction in this tenure of office?

Sampley: I would think that the satisfaction which comes to the administrative officer is the sense of the institution moving forward and developing at normal growth. That is my chief satisfaction as I see it. This is, I think, quite true. An administrative officer is simply trying to make the institution move along at its regular pace, so it's the institution rather than the officer that counts.

Haggard: Now Dr. Sampley, in 1959, I believe you requested a change in assignments. Could you tell us why you wanted to give up this vice-presidency in 1959?

Sampley: Well, there were various reasons. The fundamental and underlying reason was that I saw as soon as I became vice-president, that although this was a very important office and still is, it is a dead end intellectually.

There is little opportunity for intellectual growth, and I had made up my mind that when an opportunity came, I was going to ask to go back to teaching. I had some personal problems in that year. These I don't think that I shall discuss.

Haggard: Well, you lost your wife.

Sampley: Well, that had happened in 1954. However, I think, an administrative officer without a wife is handicapped because there are places where he needs a wife pretty badly. But I would say that the two things . . . there were personal problems which I had to deal with. Then I had made up my mind that when the opportunity came, I was going to return to teaching. That happened to be the year for it.

Haggard: I believe that you had said that teaching is the great love of your life.

Sampley: Well, teaching gives one the opportunity to study and to study with other people. It is a stimulus. It's a stimulus to intellectual growth. Of course, I was interested in writing articles and poems. I wrote practically nothing while I was vice-president. After I returned to teaching, I was able to do a good deal of writing.

Haggard: Well, thank you, Dr. Sampley. I think this is a good place to close that chapter. It was very interesting.

In part two of this interview we're going to be reminiscing with Dr. Sampley about his teaching career. In 1959, you returned to the Department of English as Distinguished Professor of English and remained in that position until your retirement in 1972.

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: Could you tell us when you received your title, Distinguished Professor of English? How is this granted?

Sampley: This was granted when I became vice-president. During a previous administration, the legislature had approved six distinguished professorships. One of these had become vacant. I don't remember how. Perhaps it had never been filled. At any rate, when I became vice-president, I was given this additional title.

Haggard: You met the criteria.

Sampley: I presume so. Actually, I assume that this was a choice made by the president of the university.

Haggard: Now before we get into your career of the last segment of your service to North Texas, let's review the scope of your teaching career. You began teaching in the University of Texas at a very early date. Is that not right? Could you tell us about your student teaching there?

Sampley: I began teaching when I was twenty years old with no previous teaching experience. However, the Committee of Professors required me to visit a class taught by Dr. Alice Cooke in freshman English. I observed her methods and learned a great deal from her. She was a good and experienced teacher. I am sure I did a good deal of floundering in that first year, as most beginning teachers do. I received my master's degree two years later and then became an instructor in English, where my salary level was higher and where I taught, in addition to freshman English, one course in sophomore English.

Haggard: This was a survey course?

Sampley: This was a survey course, yes.

Haggard: Simply English literature?

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: I thought we would look at your subject matter and your teaching methods and your relation to students at your different jobs. How were the students at the University of Texas in the twenties, the Roaring Twenties?

Sampley: Well, the twenties were a period of change for the students. Those changes came after World War I with the return of the soldiers and a quite different attitude. In some respects the twenties remind one of

the thirties because it was a time of change and a certain amount of unrest. However, as I look back on it, the changes seem mild. The one which got the most attention at the time was the shortening of the girls' dresses. Before that time girls had worn their dresses at their ankles.

Haggard: And they were bobbing hair, too, weren't they?

Sampley: And bobbing hair. This became a great issue in many families. Usually, the mother and daughter were leagued against the father and the grandmother. The father and the grandmother were determined that the daughter shouldn't bob her hair, whereas the mother and daughter were for it.

Haggard: These students weren't much older, if they were as old, as you were at the time.

Sampley: I had students who were older than I. Most of them were just a few years younger than I. I'd say they were, oh, about three or four years younger than I.

Haggard: But this was a good apprenticeship--this time of teaching--approximately five years?

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: Now your first two teaching assignments were in colleges for the training of teachers, the Louisiana State Normal and then Sul Ross State Teachers College at Alpine.

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: And this was another five-year period--one year in Louisiana and four years at Sul Ross. Tell us about your work in those two schools.

Sampley: I can hardly imagine two institutions more different or two climates more different. Louisiana was an agricultural area, rich farming land. It was an extremely conservative area. The freshmen girls, for example, were permitted only four dates during each semester, and these had to be chaparoned. Whereas, Sul Ross was in a ranching area. Living was much more free and easy. The students had more personal freedom. However, Sul Ross was a small institution, and there was a very close relation between students and faculty, a very warm and friendly relation. We had faculty-student picnics and faculty-student parties. In fact, we rather cultivated the students there. I enjoyed that.

Haggard: You were head of the Department of English.

Sampley: I was head of the department, but I can't claim much honor for that because there were only two members in the department. The institution was very small. I think in the long session it had about 300 students. In the summer, enrollment would be 900 to 1,000. Of course, we always had to employ additional teachers in the summer. But it was a small institution.

Haggard: What courses did you teach?

Sampley: Well, I taught Shakespeare. That was my specialty. But then I would teach the Romantic poets, and I also taught the Victorian poets because I . . . there were only two teachers of English, and we had to be rather versatile in what we taught in order to give the students a full education.

Haggard: That's interesting. What did you teach in Louisiana? You were an associate professor of English there.

Sampley: I taught there . . . I think my specialty was a course in world drama. That was the advanced course that I taught.

Haggard: That's interesting. Now this was a time of . . . in the depression. There was not as much evidence of the depression in these smaller schools with an agriculture and rural leaning. There was not the pinch of the depression in those schools, or was there?

Sampley: Yes, we felt it. Of course, everybody felt the depression. My salary was cut by $1,000 in 1932, and I was just one of . . . this happened to all of the teachers in the institution. It was a time of retrenchment. It was also a difficult time for students who graduated because they had a hard time finding positions. We felt the pressure of it, and the students felt the pressure of it, not, however, I think . . . in fact, I know we didn't feel it in the way

that people did in the cities. It so happened in Alpine that the Southern Pacific train ran through my backyard. I would see the boxcars loaded with drifters, many of them young people. This, of couse, was one thing which led to the founding of the program . . . I've forgotten the alphabetical letters. The program for young people developing the parks.

Haggard: The CCC program?

Sampley: . . . the CCC . . . yes.

Haggard: Conservation Corps.

Sampley: Civilian Conservation Corps. We had that at Fort Davis near Alpine, and we had it later on in Big Bend National Park.

Haggard: They made some important restorations.

Sampley: Yes, they did.

Haggard: Well, let's come along to North Texas in 1935. You came to North Texas State Teachers College and served as a professor of English until 1943. Tell us what you found at North Texas.

Sampley: North Texas, at that time, was a much smaller institution. We had a record fall enrollment in 1935 of 1,500 students. Now, of course, it's about 15,000. The institution was smaller, and it was quite different from what it is now.

The students were poor students. We drew students largely from the rural areas. They had little money. Of course, we were still in depression times. There were almost no automobiles. Therefore, the student stayed in Denton over the weekend. One of the big things to do on Saturday night was to go to the stage show. We had, also, at that time, I think, a warm friendly relation between students and faculty because the institution was small. That relation existed up to the return of the soldiers after World War II, when the institution began to be larger and lost some of that informal feeling that it had formerly enjoyed.

Haggard: What courses did you teach?

Sampley: My specialty was Shakespeare, and I also taught a course in Elizabethan drama. But as I recall, I taught Shakespeare every year. I taught it one semester, and Dr. Brodey taught it the next semester. He and I shared that course. It was my specialty. It was the field in which I had written my doctoral dissertation.

Haggard: Dr. Garrett Ballard calls World War II a dividing line. So we come to that dividing line in your career because you volunteered for the Army Air Force and took that training and served from '42 to '44, right?

Sampley: Yes.

Haggard: With the Army Air Force Ground School. Now you have said that you continued teaching in the Army. Tell us what you taught.

Sampley: Well, I taught first a course in aircraft identification. This was taught partly by lectures, but mostly by the showing of slides. The students learned to identify American aircraft and German and Japanese aircraft so that when they went into combat they would not fire on American planes but would know and would fire on foreign planes. Later, I taught a course in identification of Naval vessels which was a rather cursory introductory course. I don't know, really, how much the students got out of it. Anyhow, they learned how to recognize the vessels by the slides. They were supposed to distinguish a destroyer from a cruiser and a cruiser from a battleship. They were supposed to be able to distinguish friendly vessels from foreign vessels. Later, I taught a course which was called maps and charts and was a course in introduction to navigation. I found this the most interesting course that I taught because it did involve some principles of mathematics and navigation which were more intellectually stimulating than memorizing slides.

Haggard: Again, you're mastering subject matter yourself, and you served San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. Is that right?

Sampley: That's correct.

Haggard: And we're in San Antonio. Now you had students there that were learning for survival, not cultural enrichment or to become teachers. Tell us something about your reaction to these students and something about them.

Sampley: The thing that impressed me about these students--and it was tremendously impressive--was how hard they worked. I had been used to giving assignments in college and expecting that, oh, a third to a fourth of the class would maybe give the work just a casual glance before they came to class. The others would . . . some of the others would do it in a half-hearted way. Maybe half of them would do it . . . would care. At the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, the students, almost without exception, worked very hard and made high grades. They were eager to get on to the next stage of their training, which was actual flight training. So I was tremendously impressed by the eagerness of these students.

Haggard: These boys were young.

Sampley: Yes, they were young.

Haggard: But they had to qualify for the Air Force, which was a higher caliber.

Sampley: Yes, well, they went from one stage to another, from pre-flight . . . they went to first flight school and

then intermediate flight school and then advanced flight school. Then they were ready for combat.

Haggard: I believe you told us in a previous interview how you were notified that the war was drawing to a close and that it would be well to return to civilian life, and how you returned to North Texas. Now we have this well-documented--your return to North Texas and your career as a librarian and administrator. So we're ready for that last segment of your work, Distinguished Professor of English at North Texas in 1959 to 1972, and also you were the University Professor of Poetry in 1972-'73. So let's come back to your teaching. When you came back into the Department of English, what did you choose to teach, or where were you placed this time?

Sampley: Well, I asked to teach modern American and British poetry. I had gradually become interested in this area, especially when I was reviewing books for the Dallas News. I felt that I had learned all that I was likely to learn about Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama. I wanted to learn something new. So I concentrated in my graduate course on what I considered to be the five major poets writing in English in our time. I taught first a course in Yeats, Robinson, Frost, and Eliot. Later, the institution divided the British into one area and the American into another. So

I left off Yeats and added Wallace Stevens. This became my interest, and I wrote articles on each of those four poets. The students were specializing, I would say, in those poets. It was a very rewarding experience for me, I can say, because I was studying poets that I admired very much, not only for their techniques but for their ideas. I think the students liked the study, too, because I know most of them did well in it.

Haggard: You were writing more poetry, too, during these years.

Sampley: Yes, I don't know exactly why, but I wrote more poetry in the year 1963 than I've ever written in any one year before or since. I think my ideas jelled and came together then. But I was writing and publishing more than I had ever done before.

Haggard: Well, Dr. Sampley, in the 1963-65 biennium report of institutional accomplishments, one particular accomplishment was, "For the third year in a row, the Poetry Society of America chose a North Texas Professor for one of the top literary awards in the country." Were any of these awards yours? Or were they all yours?

Sampley: No, I think . . . now what were those years again?

Haggard: Between '63 and '65. It was three years in a row--Poetry Society of America awards.

Sampley: Well, I don't know. I know that I won awards in '64 and '65. Cecil Shufford probably won the award in '63. He won two major awards from the Poetry Society of America.

Haggard: I think your decision to go back to intellectual pursuits from your job of vice-president is proof right here that it was a right decision. Now I understand that you also had creative writing classes.

Sampley: Yes, I did. I taught creative writing until they got a better man in to teach it. Unfortunately, he just lasted a couple of years. He was an excellent teacher and a fine writer, but he died of cancer. I've forgotten his name.

Haggard: Well, you have writing students all over the country who are still using your suggestions and plans. Could you give us some of your philosophy in teaching creative writing because the proof of the pudding is for people to keep writing, and you have students who are continuing writing.

Sampley: I can't claim any credit for what a student does. If a student is going to write, he's going to write. As I told the students who came in my class, there are only two things, two ways, in which we can help you a little. One way is that I will read all that you hand in, and I

will give you my opinion about it. I will try to point out what's bad; I'll try to point out what's good. Also, I'll read to the class the best things that are turned in, and I'll ask the class to comment on what's bad and what's good, so you will have a public to write for and you will have some suggestions about how you succeeded and about how you failed. But, of course, no teacher can give you the talent for writing. That's something that is probably born in you and is certainly partly acquired by hard work. Now some of my students have gone on and have published. But I don't claim any credit for that. I simply maybe gave them a little audience for awhile, and a little criticism, but their ability is theirs. I had nothing to do with that.

Haggard: But, oh, they needed that help. Have you had freshman English classes? Have you ever been given special classes in English for the brighter students?

Sampley: Well, the last year I taught, I taught, I suppose, the brightest students . . . well, one section of the brightest students because these students were so good that we excused them from the first semester of freshman English and put them into what we called an advanced section of the second semester of freshman English. These were very bright students, and they have made their mark on the

campus. I have seen their names on the dean's list and the honor societies and winning awards. One of them was even a candidate in a beauty contest. It was a very rich experience to know these students. I'm not sure how much I helped them because they were pretty bright and had the good beginnings of a good education when they came into my class.

Haggard: Could you tell us what your greatest satisfaction from teaching was or is?

Sampley: I have pondered this question, and I have wondered just exactly what I did accomplish. Some things I feel I did accomplish. I taught some students how to write more clearly and correctly with greater attention to sentence structure, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Then I think I helped some students get better acquainted with the great masterpieces of literature, and I may have encouraged a few students to continue their interest in creative writing. But I doubt whether it is possible for a teacher to judge accurately his success in teaching. That is something which his students know better than he does.