IN MEMORIAM

MODY COGGIN BOAIGHT
(16 October 1896--20 August 1970)

Mody Boatright was as much a part of the University as it is possible for anyone to be. He was on the campus as a graduate student, teacher, administrator, and retired professor for forty-four years. He enrolled in 1922 and studied and taught at the University from that time on, except for three years at Sul Ross (1923-26) and one year at the College of Mines (1934-35). He took both his M.A. (1923) and Ph.D. (1932) at the University. He retired in the fall of 1969, but he came regularly to his office to take care of his correspondence and visit with his friends and colleagues. Mody made a sustained and valuable contribution to the intellectual life of the University.

Seen in retrospect, Mody's life seems to have moved in a definite direction from his boyhood experiences to his ultimate scholarly interests and activities. It could be said that, beginning with the materials at hand, Mody added one thing to another to construct a cumulative pattern of life for himself.

Mody grew up in the ranching country of West Texas. He was born in Mitchell County. When he was three years old, his family moved to the adjoining county, Nolan, where his father had bought a ranch. For a while the Boatright children had a governess to teach them at home; later they attended a school financed by several ranchers in the vicinity. Mody's parents were readers of Dickens, Mark Twain, and Milton; they saw to it that their children read these and other writers. Now and then a child would spend a term in school at Sweetwater. Eventually the Boatrights moved to a settlement called Maryneal near the middle of Nolan County. Mody's childhood and boyhood were spent in an environment rich in the traditions of the range and in folklore.
Mody finished the equivalent of high school at West Texas State Normal College and stayed on to study for the B.A. His schooling at Canyon was interrupted by a year in the army, 1917-18 towards the latter part of which he was stationed with the AEF at Remagen on the Rhine. While attending the Normal, Mody edited the school paper, taught in the demonstration school, wrote a play for a homecoming, and made the honor society. He later acknowledged a particular debt to one of his history teachers at Canyon, Lester F. Sheffey, who made him realize that his part of the world had a history worth studying.

After taking his B.A. in 1922, Mody decided to enter The University of Texas for graduate work. Sheffey advised him to introduce himself to J. Frank Dobie, with whom Sheffey had attended Southwestern University. When Mody came to Austin he looked Dobie up, but a close friendship with Dobie did not develop until later. On the campus Mody heard John A. Lomax talk about and sing cowboy songs—he had brought Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910) along from Canyon. In his first year at the University Mody came to know L. W. Payne, who with Lomax had founded the Texas Folklore Society in 1909. It was probably Payne's invitation that brought Mody into the Society. Mody completed his work for the M.A. in one academic year. He wrote his thesis on plot in Scott's novels under the direction of Morgan Callaway, then chairman of the Department of English.

After taking his M.A., Mody spent three years teaching at Sul Ross College in Alpine. On a visit of Dobie's to Alpine he and Mody traded stories one night on the steps of the College's main building. As editor for the Texas Folklore Society, Dobie asked Mody to write down and send him his story. This how "The Devil's Grotto" came to be published a year later in *Texas and Southwestern Lore* (1927). After Mody's return to Austin in the fall of 1926, his association and friendship with Dobie became
closer. In 1937 Dobie asked him to help edit the Society's publications.

For his doctoral dissertation Mody made a study of Scott's use of the supernatural in the Waverley novels, which he completed in 1932. Callaway was again Mody's director. The subject was attractive to Mody because it involved folk beliefs and the Boatrights were Scotch in descent. (Callaway had discouraged Lomax from studying the cowboy ballad on the ground that it was not connected with any major writer or literary movement.) Callaway was receptive to Mody's suggestion of a subject, and he left Mody to his own devices during the writing process. Before finishing, Mody showed Callaway, with misgivings, some West Texas sketches he had published, which to his surprise Callaway praised for their rendering of the vernacular. Mody later expressed his indebtedness to Callaway, the most formidable professor ever to be a member of the Department of English. Mody's work on the dissertation proved to be fruitful, for it led to the publication of three contributions to scholarship on Scott.

During the year when Mody was teaching at the College of Mines (now The University of Texas at El Paso), his first book appeared, *Tall Tales from Texas Cow Camps* (1934). In it he made use of material which he had acquired directly by living in West Texas. His next two books were texts for the teaching of English. He traveled to Pennsylvania to collect material for *Gib Morgan, Minstrel of the Oil Fields* (1945). One of Mody's leading and stimulating ideas is that folklore flourishes not only in rural societies but also in societies that make prominent use of machines. This view he amply proved in *Folklore of the Oil Industry* (1963). Mody participated with William A. Owens in an extensive project known as The Oral History of the Oil Industry. In his last book, *Tales from the Derrick Floor* (1970), he collaborated with Mr. Owens in selecting and editing stories
obtained in taped interviews with oil pioneers. This book appeared only a few days after Mody's death. He left another book in MS (see the last paragraph below).

At a time when the doctrine of the American Way was in the ascendancy and our greatness was being ascribed to individualistic competition stemming from the days of the pioneers, Mody tried to make a correction in an article of basic importance, "The Myth of Frontier Individualism" (1941). Here he argued that the frontier was characterized by cooperation rather than the pursuit of individual interests. He tried to correct another false assumption about frontiersmen in "Frontier Humor, Despairing or Buoyant?" (1942). His full-length book on frontier humor, Folk Laughter on the American Frontier (1949), showed that he was very much aware of the realities of pioneer life to which the humor was a response.

After assisting Dobie edit five volumes for the Texas Folklore Society, Mody became secretary-editor in 1943 and continued in this office until 1964. By himself or with the assistance of various associate editors, he saw eighteen of the Society's volumes through the press. He was made a Fellow of the Society in 1965. He had previously been named Fellow of the American Folklore Society.

Mody's interest in and articles on Southwestern topics led to his becoming a contributing editor of the Southwest Review. His second article had appeared in the Review in 1929. In time he became a fairly frequent contributor of articles and book reviews.

Mody was a long-time member of the Texas Institute of Letters, for which he served several years as councillor. He founded the now-flourishing American Studies Association of Texas and guided its first officers in the right direction.

Teaching always came first with Mody in the sense that he never slighted it to find time for research. He was a devoted
and hardworking teacher. His name has appeared on eight textbooks, all but the first done in collaboration with other scholars. After going on modified service in 1967 he prepared a complete set of detailed quizzes for a sophomore course that he was teaching. He did not retire until the fall of 1969.

From 1953 through the spring of 1962 Mody served as chairman of the Department of English. The years on the campus in which he had moved from graduate student to graduate professor had given him an intimate acquaintance with the personalities and problems involved in the University's largest department. He kept himself aloof from partisan politics, and no one could question his integrity. He was a good listener to those experiencing trouble in their professional or personal lives, but he was reluctant to give direct advice. He was not the kind of administrator who accepts or seems to accept every proposal or demand made by his staff members. He knew when and how to say no, and he knew how to issue a reprimand when one was called for. With his mild manner and unshakable calm he was able to turn aside or outface any crisis that might threaten.

Mody Boatright was all that anyone in the academic world could hope to be. He was outstanding as a teacher, as a scholar, and as an administrator.

After retiring, Mody turned to woodworking for recreation. Many members of the Texas Folklore Society cherish the "paisanos" which he designed and made from native woods by gluing triangular pieces together, each one unique in its proportions. He gave dozens of these to the Society to be sold to help the treasury.

Mody's daughter by his first marriage, Mrs. Frances Speck, lives in Alpine, where her husband teaches at Sul Ross. Mody's son by his second marriage, Mody Keefer Boatright, is an engineer and lives in Corpus Christi. Mody has nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Betty Keefer Boatright, Mody's wife, moved to Corpus shortly after his death. There she has continued her career as a painter.
Mody left a book in MS on the American cowboy as folk hero, but as yet not all of the chapters listed in the table of contents have been located. Some chapters have already appeared in print as articles and others are complete in MS form. When Professor Ernest B. Speck of Sul Ross State University finds the missing chapters, he will prepare the MS for publication.

Stephen H. Spurr, President of The University of Texas at Austin

Harold C. Bold, Secretary of The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Wilson M. Hudson, chairman, Clarence L. Cline, Arthur M. Cory, Joseph J. Jones.