



My Brother David

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My Brother David

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William McClelland is a composer and pianist. He lives in New Jersey where he is active in environmental issues.



David McClelland, 1973. Photo by Stephen Shore.

David C. K. McClelland (1947–1976) was a member of the Harvard Class of 1969 and an accomplished cartoonist, calligrapher, writer, and thinker. During his four years as an undergraduate he made a strong impact as a member of *The Harvard Lampoon*, as an artist, and as a scholar. He majored in Celtic Studies and Folklore and Mythology, devoted a good deal of time to philosophy, particularly the phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and kept extensive journals and notebooks. At the *Lampoon*, he was renowned for his multi-page cartoon stories and covers. While at Harvard, David created many beautifully illuminated manuscripts as well as posters for theatrical and dance productions. He also became close friends with Philip Hofer, the founder and first curator

of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts at Houghton Library, who encouraged his work in calligraphy.

David was born in Detroit, Michigan, and grew up 30 miles north of the city in Oakland Township near the community of Goodison. He had two siblings: William (me), born in 1950; and Tim, born in 1957. Our father was a sales executive for Winter Brothers Company, a cutting tool manufacturer in Rochester, Michigan, and our mother was a housewife. While neither of our parents was an artist, our great-uncle, Thomas Morrison Marker, was a professional water colorist and photographer, and our maternal grandmother, Janet Kiskadden, was an amateur poet and composer.

We grew up in a world surrounded by the arts. David was extremely precocious and learned to read at a very early age. Right away he became fascinated with comic strips and books, particularly *Pogo*, Walt Disney's *Uncle Scrooge*, *Krazy Kat*, and *MAD* magazine. As early as first and second grade he began creating his own comics, including original characters such as "D. Jected—A Duck," and "Moe Larr, the Couth Tooth." He also became devoted to the new medium of television and was deeply influenced by the animated cartoons of Disney and *Looney Tunes* as well as early TV comedians, including Ernie Kovacs, Soupy Sales, and Jonathan Winters. While his sense of humor was being nurtured by the comics and television, his family encouraged his ever-expanding interest in classical music, jazz, movies, literature, and science (particularly paleontology)—almost any artistic or intellectual endeavor one could name.

In 1962, David entered Western Reserve Academy, a boarding school in Hudson, Ohio. The school had many excellent teachers, and he found a true mentor in an extraordinary art instructor, William Moos. With Moos, David began the formal study of calligraphy and drawing and was introduced to the arts of the woodcut, linocut, and other techniques of printmaking. As David's classmate and fellow art student, Peter Scott, recalls:

Moos was outspoken, opinionated, unsentimental, sophisticated and concrete. I still cannot believe he got us to read Wöfflin's *Principles of Art History*. ... Moos was also an astute collector of art and was responsible for the school library's excellent acquisitions of graphic arts publications. It was here we got to know Arrighi's *Operina*, Edward Johnston, Rudolf Koch, W. A. Dwiggins, Hermann Zapf, John Howard Benson, Father Edward Catich, and others.¹

In fact, Moos personally knew Father Catich and introduced David to the world-renowned calligrapher and artist. David visited Catich at St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa, where he was head of the Art Department, and a long relationship began in which Catich

¹ Peter Scott, "Concerning David McClelland," in *The Inspirations of David C. K. McClelland* (W. & T. McClelland, 2019), 151.

mentored him in his development as a calligrapher. At Western Reserve, David also became the cartoonist for the school newspaper and the editor of the literary magazine *Bufo*. The cartoons, drawings, and elaborate covers he produced for these publications were the talk of the school. His most ambitious piece, an elaborate four-page cartoon story published in *Bufo* his senior year, was, in fact, his application to Harvard. He called it “The Farm” and it was subtitled “A story of a midwestern youth in today’s rolling American farmland. The rollicking tale of a middle-class boy losing to the working classes. What he learns about love, life, hay-fever and sunstroke from the fun-loving farm hands.” As one of David’s Reserve teachers, John Roberts, recalls, it was “an application so remarkable it caused the Harvard Admissions Director to call our Headmaster and offer David unqualified admission, no matter what his grades or SAT scores.”²

David entered Harvard in 1965 and immediately realized he was in his element. The teachers and students he met, the range of subjects he could study, and the extracurricular opportunities he discovered combined to set his mind ablaze. He quickly found his way to the *Lampoon* and began producing the drawings, cartoons and covers for which he would become renowned. His cartoon stories ranged from “Cyborgs” to “The Great Goodison Toad Hunt” to “Inside Straight Nate,” a psychological study of then-Harvard president Nathan Pusey. He created a Monopoly-type board game called “The Great Game of Absolution and Redemption,” which he claimed had been devised by John Calvin in Geneva but only recently “discovered with a cache of Puritan treasures in the attic of Holyoke Center.” He also created the legendary character “Boggie,” a quasi-doggie who appeared in several full-page strips such as “Boggie and California Cheeseburger,” “Rich Man, Poor Man, Boggie,” and “Boggie at Colonus.” For the cover of the November 1966 issue, David created a two-page fold-out titled “The Bayeux Travesty.” A parody of the famous 11th-century tapestry of the Norman invasion of England, his version depicted a Harvard football victory over Yale, and many consider it to be the finest *Lampoon* cover ever done. In a *Harvard Crimson* review of the June 1969 issue, John G. Short ‘70 wrote,

This issue marks the graduation of [David] McClelland. ... There’s not enough one can say to sum up the brilliance of McClelland’s years on the *Lampoon*. His cartoons have been consistently the best work of each issue, and in some of the whole-issues-full of turgid print that have been passed down recently, his work has stood out as really fabulous. Why, he’s the Ted Williams of cartoon-drawing. And his final “Inside Straight Nate: a subtle portrait of one of American education’s great entertainers” compares to Williams’ home run in his last time at bat.³

² John Roberts, “Remembrances of David” in *The Inspirations of David C. K. McClelland* (W. & T. McClelland, 2019), 179.

³ John G. Short, “The *Lampoon*,” *The Harvard Crimson*, June 9, 1969.

Ted Widmer '84, who discovered David's work when he joined the magazine in 1985, wrote, "I don't think that a greater or more singular talent ever passed through the organization."⁴

After his arrival at Harvard, David also continued his work in calligraphy. He met and became friends with Philip Hofer at Houghton Library, who recognized David's gift and took on the role of mentoring his calligraphic studies. David began producing ever more ambitious works, including manuscripts of poems or quotations done for friends, girlfriends, colleagues, and family members. He created posters for theater and dance productions and had a highly regarded one-man show of his works at Adams House in December of his senior year.

David's interests in other areas also expanded at Harvard. He immersed himself in the study of Celtic languages, particularly Welsh, as well as mythology, folklore, and philosophy. In the summer after his junior year, he combined his passion for Welsh and folklore in a remarkable trip he made to the Patagonia region of southern Argentina with his classmate and friend David Lagomarsino '69. There they met and interviewed residents of the Welsh settlement founded in the late 19th century—one of the few Celtic colonies established in modern times. They recorded stories and music and studied the folklore and children's games of the community there, and it was about this trip and their findings that David wrote his senior thesis, for which he was awarded *summa cum laude*.

David accomplished all these things at Harvard despite an affliction that first manifested itself in 1966: bipolar disorder. After his freshman year he returned home to Michigan with the intention of getting a job for the summer, but it was soon apparent to all of us that he was in distress. He had been home for only a short time when one Saturday, without telling anyone, he took his car and drove back to Cambridge. Fortunately, friends there got him to McLean Hospital where he remained for the rest of the summer and as an out-patient throughout his sophomore year. He stayed in therapy for the rest of his time at Harvard and his mental state did stabilize for periods of time. Sadly, however, psychiatric treatment was never able cure his illness, and David took his own life in 1976.

While he was allowed to graduate with his class in 1969, David's illness prevented him from fulfilling all his coursework and he still had to complete several credits in order to receive his diploma. He stayed in Cambridge until the fall of 1970, when he received an offer to write for a new children's television program called *Sesame Street*. He moved to New York City and had been working at the show for only a short time when he experienced his first major episode of depression since his freshman year. He left the show and came back to Cambridge to stay with me until he recovered and could function again. He returned to New York but over the next few years he had a number of relapses. During the "up" periods in New York, however, he was as productive as ever, working as a free-

⁴ Ted Widmer, "I dreamt I was a butterfly," in *The Inspirations of David C. K. McClelland* (W. & T. McClelland, 2019), 34.

lance cartoonist and writing for a variety of publications. His cartoons appeared in the *National Lampoon*, where he created a wonderful series called “Subterranean Scumbo,” and *Harper’s Magazine*, and he co-founded a short-lived but amazing magazine called *The Real World*. He wrote articles and profiles for magazines including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *Harper’s*.

During his years in New York, he continued to stay in touch with Philip Hofer, who frequently helped to keep David afloat financially. From 1970 to 1974, Hofer commissioned over 50 manuscripts from him, including pieces with texts by the poets and writers Rumi, Kao Shih, John Berryman, and John Cage; passages from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*; and two completely original works. It isn’t known whether David or Hofer ever told anyone else about the existence of these works. When Hofer died in 1984, he willed the manuscripts to Houghton Library, and it was only by chance that I discovered their existence in 2008 when I came upon a description about them on the Houghton Library website.

For 30 or so years after David’s death in 1976, my brother Tim and I—and friends like Ian “Sandy” Frazier ’73 (whose essay about David appears here)—would sometimes talk about collecting his pieces from *The Harvard Lampoon* and other cartoons in a volume along with some of the manuscripts he had made for family members. Perhaps because of the jarring dichotomy between cartoons like “Boggie and California Cheeseburger” and illuminated manuscripts of quotations from books like Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, or maybe because there was, we assumed, only a relatively small amount of fine calligraphy, our discussions never progressed beyond the speculative stage. After discovering the Houghton manuscripts, however, and confirming their extraordinary quality, we realized that David had produced a body of work worthy of a book. We began contacting his friends and colleagues about the project and were thrilled to learn there were more pieces he had made as gifts or commissions: a magnificent manuscript of a quotation from *Jubilate Agno (Rejoice in the Lamb)* by Christopher Smart; song lyrics by Robert Johnson, Skip James, and Bob Dylan; poems by Wallace Stevens and William Blake; a manuscript by Rumi from the *Divani Shamsi Tabriz*; and others. With the help of Michael Thompson ’69, one of David’s close friends and a Lowell House roommate, a book titled *The Inspirations of David C. K. McClelland* slowly took shape.

Two versions of the book were ultimately produced. One was a single, large volume with reproductions of almost every piece he made printed at actual size, with a cover designed by Tim incorporating examples of the different types of the actual papers David had used. It also included seven essays about David and his work. The second book was a smaller paperback volume that included the essays and a smaller selection of reproductions. In this volume there is also a long piece by David Lagomarsino describing their trip to the Welsh settlement in Argentina called “Our Great Patagonian Adventure,” and 19 short remembrances of David by friends and colleagues. A copy of the smaller book was given to everyone who had contributed to the books and to those who attended a celebration held

in David's memory at Harvard's Signet Society on May 29, 2019. The celebration featured a show of David's works including six of the original manuscripts from the Houghton Library collection and the original "Bayeux Travesty" *Lampoon* cover.⁵

Since the Signet celebration, another remarkable discovery has come to light. David was a prolific diarist and wrote extensively about his interests ranging from calligraphy to phenomenology to Celtic studies to personal relationships and more. Most of his diaries were left to Houghton Library, where they now reside. One that is not in Houghton, however, was discovered in 2021 at the Harry Ransom Center at The University of Texas at Austin. In March, 2023, I received an email from the Center's Curator of Early Books and Manuscripts, Aaron T. Pratt, who informed me that he had acquired "a dense theological work printed in England ~1590 that was bound with a couple of dozen blank leaves at the end in the 17th century and subsequently used as the diary of a student at Harvard in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Upon arrival, research revealed it to be a book that Philip Hofer gave to your brother after removing several engravings from it."

Mr. Pratt wrote that they planned to include David's "diary" in an exhibition entitled *The Long Lives of Very Old Books*, exploring the circuitous histories that many early European books took from their original printing to their presence in modern institutional collections. The exhibition, which ran through December 30, 2023, also included such items as all three of the Center's copies of the Shakespeare First Folio and a Bible that purportedly traveled to New England on the *Mayflower*.⁶

To follow are two essays about David and his work. The first is by Sandy Frazier, a classmate of mine at Western Reserve Academy and lifelong friend who knew David before, during, and after his time at Harvard. The second essay is by Harvard art historian and curator Melissa Renn, who writes in detail about the manuscripts and the importance of David McClelland's work.

⁵ For video of the Signet Society event, see William McClelland, "Celebrating David C. K. McClelland," the Signet Society, Cambridge, Massachusetts, recorded May 19, 2019, YouTube video, 45:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC7iz79WBJ8>.

⁶ The exhibition ran through December 30, 2023. See *The Long Lives of Very Old Books*, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Texas, <https://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/2023/long-lives-of-very-old-books/#survival>.