A mother of anthropology:
the first detailed portrait of Ruth Benedict

Also inside:
the search for Vassar's Japanese princess
A chance to renew some classic ties

Shown here, the class of 1882. Class president and valedictorian Sutematsu Yamakawa (seated fourth row, fifth from left) is the subject of a feature in this issue, page 10.

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Features

5 Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life
By the time you read these words, the University of Pennsylvania Press will have published the first full-length critical biography of Ruth Fulton Benedict, V.C. '09, a poet who went on to become one of the foremost anthropologists of the century. In this issue, the Quarterly brings you an excerpt from this work by Judith Schachter Modell '63, who speaks of the connections between Benedict and herself that led to the book.

10 The girl thrown away forever: memories of a princess
One hundred years ago, there graduated from Vassar a student of unusual intelligence and self-possesion. Her name was Sutematsu Yamakawa; she was the first Japanese woman to earn a baccalaureate degree, and she eventually became a full-fledged princess. With a little help from the Vassar community, Megan Baldridge Murray writes, Sutematsu's great-granddaughter is intriguing modern Japan with her ancestor's story. As a point of reference, Jorge Ribeiro '75 provides a letter about women in Japan today.

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A curable romantic by Susanna Eszenyi Bedell '40

Cover: Drawing of anthropologist Ruth Fulton Benedict '09 by an unknown artist around the 1946 publication of The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, her pathbreaking book on Japanese culture. Drawing courtesy Vassar Special Collections.

Back cover: The Santa Fe Opera House, © 1979 David Stein.

Second year in a row
CASE honors Quarterly in "Best Articles" competition
“Seeing Mary plain,” a portrait of Mary McCarthy '33 by Thomas Mallon of the Vassar English department, has earned a citation from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) in its “Best Articles of the Year” prize category. Mr. Mallon's piece, which appeared in the Spring 1982 Quarterly, was occasioned by Miss McCarthy’s residence on campus the preceding February as the subject of the President’s Distinguished Visitor program. CASE introduced the “Best Articles” category into its annual Recognition awards in 1982. That year, the judges accorded the Quarterly a citation for an essay on teaching by Brett Singer ’74, published in the Spring/Summer 1981 issue.
Losing at Authors?

In “Lights and Shadows, a tribute to John Gardner (1953-1982),” Karen Andes (’78) has written a tribute to her own career rather than the late novelist’s. I am generally very interested in the paths former classmates have taken since graduation, but in this case, I was looking forward to learning something about Mr. Gardner and his remarkable work. What a disappointment.

Sally Kilbridge ’78
New York, NY

I once saw George Plimpton across a crowded room. His hair was silver. Yale, a computer-game huckster, publicity hound, slick journalist, he attracted a group of fervent admirers, while Bill Buckley, at the same party, got me mixed up with someone who went to St. George’s prep; and I had the pleasure of standing, intimidated, underneath his aristocratic nose.

I admired Tom Wolfe’s nice lemon-yellow linen suit at a conference in the Plaza Hotel, but he didn’t get around to asking me if I wanted to be a great writer. I never have gotten up the nerve to ask Isaac Bashevis Singer to read any of my impromptu scribbles, which are certainly not going to be included, arbitrarily, in a novel that I’m not working on anyway.

Kurt Sales once threw me into a silt-choked pond at a square dance when I was 12. Michael Weller thought my senior thesis was nice and even came to see it performed; however, I resisted the urge to flee to Popular Mechanics for a makeover.

Isaac Asimov attended a film opening with me, but he sat on the other side of the audience. And Jamie Collier stared at me during a dinner at a sushi restaurant after a gallery opening, but dreams of his asking me to be his protégée never did come true.

The only thing I wanted to ask John Gardner at that lecture (which was held in Cushing living room) was how he managed to come up with such great fairy tales? Unfortunately, too many future Famous Authors were quizzing him on morals and Chaucer for me to get a word in. I sincerely regret the lost opportunity now.

And if any writer were to tell me: keep writing like this, kid, and you’ll be one of the greats, I think I would, very solemnly, vomit.

Why did you bother to publish such tripe?

Shane Mitchell ’79
New York, New York

Karen Andes replies: In my piece on John Gardner I wanted to show what a thorough, patient teacher he was, though, considering his fame and busy life, didn’t have to be. I was fortunate to have shed my fear of him, just in time to study with him before he died. I thought this might assist other young artists who feel that their work is not good enough for sharing, or that the great artists are too distant and uncaring to learn from.

Judges

My mother, Dorothy Embry Cross, class of 1913, now lives with me, and would very much appreciate receiving your magazine here. She thoroughly enjoys it — reads it over and over!

Olivia Davies
Los Gatos, California

Aha! At last I found (somewhere ... in the boxed italics on page 11, Winter 1983) why the Vassar Quarterly is so one-sided and restricted in its socio-political "content or emphasis," in its approach, and in its slant! One reads (sic): "... editorial decisions are solely the responsibility of the editor" and "The Quarterly committee, appointed and chaired by the editor, is purely an advisory group" and "Some alumnices' magazines are indeed under their colleges' control. Vassar's magazine isn't one of them."

The editor tells us that the Quarterly is (only) published by Vassar’s AAVC. If publishes includes pays for, I, as one of Vassar’s Old Grads, wish that the AAVC would withhold the portion of our unrestricted giving that we allot to the Quarterly (including its office space and staff). This might make the editor aware to the reality of being responsive to all of one’s readership.

I liked what Vassar’s Alumnae Magazine used to be. Since becoming the Quarterly, our AAVC publication has been deteriorating rapidly. I wonder how others of us feel.

Anne Nelson Stommel ’45-4
Rumson, New Jersey

The Quarterly welcomes letters to the editor, preferably typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 350 words. We reserve the right to edit letters for style and length.

Editor’s note: Although we take a different view of the magazine than Ms. Stommel does, we’re delighted to have the opportunity to clear up a misunderstanding reflected in her letter.

It concerns the link between AAVC and AAVC Fund. During the mid-seventies, AAVC transferred its fund-raising operation to the college, as part of an overall agreement between Vassar and AAVC. As a result, AAVC staff and overhead are no longer directly underwritten by the AAVC Fund, but instead come out of a college budget. The budget is approved by the AAVC board, but is administered and ultimately controlled by Vassar. This complicated relationship notwithstanding, the editorial independence of the magazine continues to be supported by both Main Building and Alumnae House.

In memoriam

Florence McCulloch ’44, professor of French at Wellesley College, died November 29, 1982, after a triumphant battle with cancer. She was one of the most distinguished scholars of our class. Her book, Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries, published by the University of North Carolina Press, is the recognized authority in the field, and many of her articles on the lives of medieval saints have appeared in Speculum, Romaina, and other distinguished journals.

Florence was a tireless traveler in pursuit of her special interest. Bestiaries, popular in the Middle Ages, were stories of real and imagined animals, fantastically pictured and described. They inspired the animal symbolism prevalent in religious art and literature of the time.

At Vassar I had missed French and art history, but with others I was inspired by Florence and in 1980 I received my Ph.D. in medieval French, cheered on by my grand-children. Florence and I made several trips together while I was studying in France.

Continued on page 48
Foreign policy and the C.I.A.

"There is always the danger that local wars, civil wars, will draw in the major powers."
Flora Lewis, foreign affairs columnist for the New York Times was speaking to an audience that had crowded the Villard Room in February. "But the key to peace is still in Europe.

"There has been a change in attitude in western Europe since World War II," she went on. "It wasn't very long ago that war was seen as a noble enterprise. But it is an enormous change, of great importance, that there are really no more border disputes in western Europe. It is a conflict that keeps western Europe stable. Those countries would no longer conceive of going to war (with each other). But every border in eastern Europe is still in dispute. It is the Red Army which enforces the borders in eastern Europe. This was a deliberate policy initiated by Stalin to maintain control. But this partition of Europe is unnatural. It can't last. It is intolerable, but I see no visible way of getting out of it that is not more dangerous. The partition of Europe is still the greatest danger to peace."

Having stated her view of foreign affairs, Ms. Lewis, who was at Vassar to deliver the annual Barbara Bailey Brown lecture for international understanding, went on to outline her favored approach to foreign policy. The loss of a bipartisan foreign policy — one consequence, she said, of the Vietnam war — has resulted in a vacillating U.S. approach to the world. "When an oak tree sways in the wind it is dangerous to the whole neighborhood. Our drastic reversals of policy (every four years), or even of rhetoric, which implies drastic changes of policy, are extremely disruptive for both our allies and our opponents. The most important thing we need is a broad consensus on American goals in the world and on how to meet them."

She suggests that such a consensus could be developed around a bipartisan proposal for arms control. "But we also need a broad consensus on how to deal with the Soviet Union and on how to handle relations with the Third World. We have to decide how to deal with the exasperation and despair that brings its own arrogance. We need to have an acceptance that we all have common interests, common needs."

And, warning Americans against an arrogance that can come with confidence, she reminded her audience, "Governments have to, as Henry Kissinger said, almost always act on insufficient data. We must always worry when we get too confident that we aren't looking far enough."

The next evening, again in a crowded Villard Room, again the subject was foreign affairs. Former Central Intelligence Agency field agent and Colonel John Stockwell, now C.I.A. renegade and author of the exposé In Search of Enemies, warned his audience that the United States "must reverse its position of paranoia against communism."

Mr. Stockwell, whose appearance at Vassar was sponsored by a bevy of campus organizations, regaled his audience with stories of his participation in C.I.A. operations in the (then) Belgian Congo, in Vietnam, and in Angola. He told tales of ineptness, which elicited laughter; tales of deaths and sadism, which elicited quiet horror; tales of the "corruption of intelligence" so that the agency would support predetermined policy decisions — which brought into question the raison d'être of the C.I.A.

"I could see the C.I.A. running operations for operations' sake," Mr. Stockwell said. "When the C.I.A. was formed in 1947, part of the legislation said that the work was fundamentally repugnant, but necessary. But these operations are not fundamentally repugnant. They are irresistible. They are fun."

In fact, Mr. Stockwell claims, the C.I.A.'s covert operations are not necessary. "In 1972 we were told that four percent of U.S. intelligence comes from human sources (spies). We knew that one to two percent of our reports were 'quality' — not 'corrupted,' not old news."

"But the U.S. government wants anti-communist leaders installed, at any cost. That's the name of the game. Where this is done, the C.I.A. claims success. But I submit that these are failures, because the process of installing those governments involves the corruption of those governments and those societies. The people who want to reform their societies are forced to turn to the Soviet Union for support. It's handing the world to the Soviet Union on a silver platter."

Though the operations by which the
C.I.A. intervenes in the affairs of foreign countries are frequently labeled "covert," Mr. Stockwell maintains that "the people out in the world who are the victims know that the United States is responsible. The secrecy is to prevent the American people from learning what is being done in their name, because they are the only ones who can do anything.

"We need good intelligence," Mr. Stockwell said, and then gave a brief rundown of the technology that is used to obtain information without risk to human life. "But we need desperately to get rid of the C.I.A."

— G.W.

**Living instruction**

The late Jonathan Clark (1941-1983)

Mr. Clark, an associate professor of history at Vassar, died this past winter after a brief illness. The following reflections were delivered at a memorial service for him.

It is one of the ironies of the teaching profession that the students you like best and appreciate most are those to whom you can't really teach anything. Not because they can't learn, but because they already have, because they got there ahead of you. They already know the important things.

Jon Clark, for me, was that kind of student. I remember him just as he appeared at my office door 14 years ago. He was straight from Berkeley. And Berkeley in those days was a symbol in these parts for everything far out — the center of the student revolution, a place populated by people with long hair and freakish clothes, people possessed by an overdose of self-righteousness and a suspicion of anyone over 30.

Jon didn't look much like that. He wore, instead, that sardonic, knowing smile that mirrored his attitude toward the world. And he wanted to study, of all things, American Colonial history, scarcely a "relevant" subject in the language of the time. We talked, and as we talked I knew at once that this was a man who would teach me more than I could ever teach him.

To be sure, Jon was a little older than most graduate students; he was 27. Before finishing college he had seen a bit of the world and watched the way it works. But that was not the point; the point was that he was grown up, a state that some people never reach. And he had managed it without losing the enthusiasm of youth for making the world somehow a better place than the one he had been watching. He was ready to demand more of the world than the world is ever likely to give, more justice, more fairness, more honesty, but he knew better than to expect to get what he demanded. He knew how to be angry, but not surprised, at injustice, unfairness, and dishonesty.

I think he was drawn to Early American history, as so many of us have been, by a recognition of the same sort of attitude among the New England Puritans. They, too, demanded righteousness and expected unrighteousness. Such an attitude is quite different from cynicism. There was nothing cynical about the Puritans and there was nothing cynical about Jon Clark. He and they were both realists. Behind that infectious smile of his there was not only amusement at human pretensions, but sympathy too, not only a recognition of human weakness, but an admiration for human striving and an eagerness to take part in it.

More than that, there was something that drew him to other human beings, past and present. Jon Clark was a good historian for the same reason that he was so good a friend: he took other people seriously and took their striving seriously. As a student, Jon wound up spending most of his time on a group of people to whom other historians had already given a good deal of attention: the 55 men who drafted the United States Constitution. What distinguished Jon's work was that he took these founding fathers and their striving seriously, more seriously than most historians ever have. He did not ask what hidden motives moved them, what vested interests they were trying to protect. He took all that for granted and looked at what they did with a mind open to the possibility that they may have meant what they said to each other. In other words, he treated them fairly. As a result, I think he understood them better than anyone else has.

In striking him down at the age of 41, life seems to have dealt unfairly with Jon. And indeed it has. But that is not quite the way that Jon, with his realism, would have looked at it. When I called his and my old friend, Jack Hexter, to tell him the bad news, we both remarked on this, and Jack responded, as Jon would have: "Fairness is just not built into the system." It isn't. But people like Jon can remind us that, while we should not expect it of the system, we should keep on demanding it of ourselves.

— Edmund Morgan

Edmund Morgan is Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University.

**Corrigenda**

Geraldine Herron, our sharp-eyed copy editor, was called away from her work by family illness while we were putting together the Spring issue, and the mice did play during her absence. First of all, the building on page 1 is not San Lorenzo, but the Cathedral of Florence. Then, the "Dr. Steele" mentioned on page 10 should read "Dr. Seelman." In the caption on page 18, the name of the photographer responsible for *Girl at Spinning Machine, Carolina Cotton Mill* was inadvertently omitted: it is, of course, Lewis Hine. And speaking of photography, Steven Tucker photographed both the Ivos Facetti print reproduced on page 20 and the Roman sarcophagus panel shown on page 29. Finally, a word in the poem by E-su Zen on page 14 is incorrect. The passage should read, "Where there is rage, and struggle, and tears, / And visions of love."

— M.A.
Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life

Ruth Benedict — perhaps the best-selling American anthropologist of our time. Her ideas about culture helped change our intellectual life. Her friendship with Margaret Mead helped change our social attitudes. This spring, the University of Pennsylvania Press publishes the first full-length biography of the figure whom cultural anthropologists now might term "the mother of us all."

by Judith Schachter Modell '63
Introduction by Georgette Weir

"There stood Columbia University," wrote anthropologist Ruth Murray Underhill, V.C. '05, in a 1978 biographical preface to a reprint of her 1936 monograph Papago Woman.

"I tramped through its time-worn halls, from one department to another, with my question: 'What subjects do you teach that will help me to understand people's behavior?"

"Most answers sounded like a proclamation of ultimate truth. But they were stereotyped — right out of a book. Until I reached Anthropology and the late Ruth Benedict. She was a kind and beautiful woman as well as learned. She said: 'Come in here.' And that settled it."

In 1923 a subsequently more famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead, had similarly found her way into the then-young discipline. At that time a graduate student in psychology at Columbia, Mead had developed an appetite for anthropology as a senior at Barnard in classes taught by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. Benedict turned Mead's enthusiasm for anthropology to a professional commitment, telling her, as Mead has reported, "Professor Boas and I have nothing to offer but an opportunity to do work that matters."

The daughter of a Vassar graduate (Bertrice Shattuck Fulton V.C. 1885), Ruth Fulton Benedict and her sister Margery entered Vassar College in 1905 — 20 years before the introduction of any courses in anthropology at Vassar (and then, they would be included in the department of zoology. Anthropology did not become a separate division of the Vassar curriculum until 1939). Benedict majored in English. After graduating, she spent a year traveling in Europe with classmates. Upon her return to the States, she drifted into jobs as teacher and social worker. In 1914 she married and settled in New York City, where, in 1919, she signed up for courses at the New School for Social Research, happening onto anthropology classes taught by Elsie Clews Parsons. From the New School and Parsons, Benedict moved, in 1921, to Columbia University and Franz Boas. There she earned her Ph.D. in 1923 and stayed on as a teacher in the graduate department for over 20 years.

During summer vacations she traveled West to study American Indians in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Montana.

In time, Benedict became both a best-selling anthropologist (Patterns of Culture, 1934; The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, 1946) and a controversial public figure — the latter primarily a result of her book Race: Science and Politics, and pamphlet, Races of Mankind. These were published during World War II and challenged commonly accepted notions of racial superiority and inferiority. In 1944 correspondence (part of the Benedict Collection in Special Collections), Benedict noted about the pamphlet that in it she stressed "always that no scientific measurements of superiority have ever been devised which are culture-free..." In another letter of the same year she wrote: "People always read 'skin color' to mean heredity — disregarding environment and the consequences of race discrimination." Benedict's politics were informed and motivated by her anthropology. In 1934 she had written in Patterns of Culture: "To point out that the biological bases of cultural behavior in mankind are for the most part irrelevant is not to deny that they are present. It is merely to stress the fact that the historical factors are dynamic."

In a brief biography and evaluation of Ruth Benedict prepared recently by members of Vassar's anthropology department preliminary to planning a centennial celebration of Benedict for 1986-87, Patterns of Culture is described as "the first popular anthropology book. . . . It has probably had the greatest sales of any anthropology book and continues to be widely read and influential today. . . . Patterns of Culture is no longer central to anthropological theory because of Benedict's ethnocentric inaccuracies; however, in other disciplines such as sociology and psychology her work is still seen as a serious contribution to current theoretical perspectives."

About The Chrysanthemum and the Sword the Vassar anthropologists wrote: "As significant in its way as the Japanese study itself is her demonstration that anthropology
Ruth Benedict anticipated current feminist thought precisely in her perception of links between self and other in the conduct of an inquiry. She learned that a vividly evoked scene mirrored self as much as did varied personae.

was no esoteric subject remote from reality but a substantive applied discipline which offered insights into the lives of people meaningful in many ways.

"Today at Vassar College Ruth Benedict is not only seen as a credit to her Vassar education, but her works also continue to be used in a number of courses. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is used in Ethnography of Japan, while *Patterns of Culture* is used in History of Anthropological Theory and Culture and Personality. In addition, it is used in the psychology department in courses in cross-cultural development."

Recently, as a consequence of the brouhaha that has accompanied publication of Derek Freeman's study of Mead's Samoan fieldwork, _Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth_, Mead and, less conspicuously, Benedict have been returned to public life. In this book Freeman notes: "(T)he eager young student (Mead) and the shy teaching assistant with the consuming interest in cultural patterns (Benedict) had entered into an intimate friendship and a zealous intellectual collaboration that was to have momentous consequences for the development of cultural anthropology." Freeman's interpretation is that those consequences most importantly include an anthropological perspective that is one of absolute cultural determinism. In turn, Freeman has been criticized for misreading the viewpoint espoused by Benedict and Mead. The debate continues, with gusto.

It is in this storm that anthropologist and author Judith Schachter Modell '63 and the University of Pennsylvania Press deliver _Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life_. The book, scheduled to be published this month (May 1983), took root in Dr. Modell's reading of Margaret Mead's 1959 work, _An Anthropologist at Work_. Mead's book was both an anthology of Benedict's writings and a biography written by a former student and long-time close friend. Dr. Modell's volume, an excerpt of which appears here, is the first full-length critical biography of Ruth Benedict.

In 1959 Margaret Mead published _An Anthropologist at Work_. Throughout the book, between "the writings of Ruth Benedict," she interspersed biographical sections based on personal contact and on documents. The resulting collection provides several perspectives on the anthropologist: a life story in anthology form. Ruth appreciated the value of multiple perspectives; she also emphasized the importance of a whole, integrated, and evocative portrait. . . . Mead did not aim for a distanced overview of life-and-works or for a strict and penetrating analysis of Ruth's character. Mead does sketch the dominant motives in her friend's life, leaving material for a reader to organize into a meaningful "whole." She also described a friendship.

The friendship flourished between 1923 and World War II, a guidepost in each woman's course. Ten years after Ruth's death in 1948, Margaret may not have been the ideal person to look appraisingly or analytically at Ruth Benedict. Their intimacy, intense around interruptions, imposed restraints on Mead as literary editor, but even more, constrained her public interpretations of Ruth's struggles to unify love, work, marriage, and career. The two women discussed everything from love affairs to international peace negotiations; these discussions laid the foundation for lifetime habits of mind and emotion and, as well, for a significant anthropology. Not all could be told and, Mead admitted, even given the perpetual conversations there were still things about Ruth she did not know or, knowing, did not understand. Margaret could not, for instance, compare her relationship to Ruth's other attachments: some "passions" Ruth never mentioned. Too, Ruth's marriage to Stanley Benedict remained a problem. Margaret openly expressed her perplexity at that relationship. . . .

_An Anthropologist at Work_ inspired my undertaking. Margaret Mead encouraged my project, knowing that not all the documents had been used and that not all the points had been made. Her collection served as a major source for me, containing otherwise unavailable materials (e.g., Edward Sapir's letters, Ruth's presumably having been lost in a fire), information a close woman friend would have, and an awareness of Benedict's professionalization special to a fellow anthropologist.

In 1972 I added to the account of _An Anthropologist at Work_ an extended interview with Margaret Mead. She had just published _Blackberry Winter_, and memories crowded her mind; she talked eagerly, vividly, and lovingly about Ruth. Margaret Mead left me with much to think about, a certain amount to suppress (or not announce), and a great deal of support for my interpretations. Her support of my biography lasted until her death in November 1978. . . .

My own point of view comes from an involvement with Ruth Benedict that, though not firsthand, was intense. I did not have to manage the constraints of friendship; I did have to struggle with the demands of a continual self-exploration. A question about Ruth Benedict's life often prompted one
about my own. This set up a process of reciprocal insight, and I learned more about Ruth as a woman and anthropologist while exploring my responses to those roles . . . .

I was . . . alert to temperamental and contextual differences. Ruth Benedict and I were not alike and not contemporaries, but we did share certain situations. I recognized the Vassar that Ruth Benedict went to from 1905 to 1909, surprisingly like the Vassar I attended half a century later. The Columbia University neighborhood had changed in fifty years, but I “knew” her office, classrooms, Low Library, and nearby restaurants. Situational similarities had life-course parallels; I, too, shifted from literature to anthropology after a nonacademic interruption. These similarities supported my decision to compare her statements to instances in my life. I opted for a kind of judgment entailing a large but (I hope) proportioned dose of speculation . . . .

The material Ruth Benedict saved substantiated my view of a searching, restless, and discreet woman. She kept few personal papers; aside from the journals and small diaries, she saved drafts of short stories, poems, and literary pieces. I found little personal correspondence, though I assume such letters are in the closed boxes at Vassar College. The Ruth Benedict Collection at Vassar contained ten open and full file boxes; two boxes were closed until 1999, a restriction iterated in Mead’s will in 1978.

Ruth did save letters about her work and the profession: the future of anthropology, the place of folklore in anthropology, and the bearing of selected disciplines on cross-cultural research. A foresightful academic, she also saved letters about research money and publications, written for herself and by the 1930s for her students. These letters testify to the intertwining of her professional life and her private life. Ruth rarely spoke about her work in a neutral voice, and she wasted no time, breath, or paper on issues she considered trivial or people she deemed inconsequential.

The American Philosophical Society houses the Franz Boas correspondence, including letters to and from Ruth Benedict. In these I observed the student become close friend and colleague; the friendship between Ruth and Franz Boas grew out of and then determined the contours of anthropology. The American Folk-Lore Society letters (1927-1940) show a harassed editor arguing against uncooperative and wordy contributors, bemoaning clumsy style, and pleading for money to support the Journal of American Folklore. Again, a sarcastic phrase, a candid plea for help and advice, an untutored appreciation of effort revealed the woman’s character.

I read these materials as I think Ruth Benedict would have, waiting for the sudden realization of pattern that comes from constant reinterpretation of data. Throughout my aim has been to gather “those impressions and turns of phrase which more than any statement of fact shape life in biographies as they do in reality.” . . .

I read Margaret Mead’s An Anthropologist at Work ten years ago while studying processes of translation from private to public statement, my focus on women. Mead’s collection of Ruth Benedict writings, selectively arranged around her memories of a friend and colleague, caught my attention, the juxtaposition of private and public startlingly apt. My initial attraction to Ruth had not been to an important anthropologist or to a feminist.

My decision to supplement Mead’s account with a full-length biography, however, presumed a judgment of Ruth Benedict’s importance. Her distinct style of translating private expression into public text had importance because “public” became an influential anthropology and a position on contemporary events. Ruth’s anthropological approaches and her political attitudes shared roots, I discovered, with her understanding of feminism, what she called the “woman issue.” . . .

Ruth Benedict anticipated current feminist thought precisely in her perception of links between self and other in the conduct of an inquiry. In order to specify the features of and the constraints on her life as a woman, she imagined herself in another woman’s life, in another place, of another temperament entirely. She learned, too, that a vividly evoked scene mirrored self as much as did varied personae. Through her “figures” — settings and heroines — Ruth constructed and changed a conceptualization of herself as a woman. Hers was not a political feminism, but an engaged intellectual approach first to the lives of women and then to the life of any individual. My feminism appears to be much of a piece with hers.

Ruth carried the attempt to relate “woman’s nature” to conventional demands into her cross-cultural research. Her feminism — her concern with women — influenced the content of an anthropology focused on the individual-in-culture and the attitude of an anthropologist determined to widen the parameters of individual choice. As a woman and an anthropologist, Ruth Benedict adopted a viewpoint that sometimes baffled and frustrated her. The effort to respect diverse designs did not rest easily with a need to maintain — and occasionally
From *Patterns of Culture*  
by Ruth Fulton Benedict

The diversity of custom in the world is not . . . a matter which we can only helplessly chronicle. Self-torture here, head-hunting there, prenuptial chastity in one tribe and adolescent license in another, are not a list of unrelated facts, each of them to be greeted with surprise wherever it is found or wherever it is absent. The tabus on killing oneself or another, similarly, though they relate to no absolute standard, are not therefore fortuitous. The significance of cultural behavior is not exhausted when we have clearly understood that it is local and man-made and hugely variable. It tends also to be integrated. A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action. Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each person further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogeneous items of behavior take more and more congruous shape. Taken up by a well-integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses. The form that these acts take we can understand only by understanding first the emotional and intellectual mainsprings of that society.

Such patterning of culture cannot be ignored as if it were an unimportant detail. The whole, as modern science is insisting in many fields, is not merely the sum of all its parts, but the result of a unique arrangement and interrelation of the parts that has brought about a new entity. . . .

([Integration of cultures is not in the least mystical. It is the same process by which a style in art comes into being and persists. Gothic architecture, beginning in what was hardly more than a preference for altitude and light, became, by the operation of some canon of taste that developed within its technique, the unique and homogeneous art of the thirteenth century. It discarded elements that were incongruous, modified others to its purposes, and invented others that accorded with its taste. When we describe the process historically, we inevitably use animistic forms of expression as if there were choice and purpose in the growth of this great art-form. But this is due to the difficulty in our language-forms. There was no conscious choice, and no purpose. What was at first no more than a slight bias in local forms and techniques expressed itself more and more forcibly, integrated itself in more and more definite standards, and eventuated in Gothic art.

What has happened in the great art-styles happens also in cultures as a whole. All the miscellaneous behavior directed toward getting a living, mating, warring, and worshipping the gods, is made over into consistent patterns in accordance with unconscious canons of choice that develop within the culture. Some cultures, like some periods of art, fail of such integration, and about many others we know too little to understand the motives that actuate them. But cultures at every level of complexity, even the simplest, have achieved it. Such cultures are more or less successful attainments of integrated behavior, and the marvel is that there can be so many of these possible configurations.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20832113)

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preach — long-held principles. The result was a continual compromise, characteristic of her outlook on the woman issue, of her anthropological assessment of cultures and of her political activism in World War II.

Yet Ruth clung to a belief in individuality and in the importance of individual vision. She persuaded herself, and others, to attend to the promptings of nature and of dreams; these fit into and revitalized the existing design. Through individual vision, a society was invigorated and could recompose its pattern. Ruth’s view of culture creating, then being created by, each individual formed both her particular feminism and her innovative anthropology . . .

The daydreams and fantasies of her childhood, dissatisfaction with jobs and with acquaintances, a “barren” marriage, “her own bewildered struggles” — all stretched feminism into a broader political outlook, ultimately a philosophical position. Throughout her life, her writings, and her career she searched for ways of channeling restless energies into proper and effective form. In the end this quest led to an anthropology at once original and obedient to disciplinary rules.

In 1919 Ruth Benedict enrolled in her first anthropology course, almost at the same moment writing in her journal: “Nature lays a compelling and very distressing hand upon women.” That year, too, she drafted an essay on the “woman issue.” Unknowingly she had by then the building blocks of her discipline: a perception of conflict between self-fulfillment and custom, and a rhetoric that embedded “cold dry logic” in evocative imagery. Consistent with the rest of her life, Ruth’s anthropology acknowledged the stress of individuality, the push of the particular against conventions and absolutes. And her anthropology illustrated the delicate balance entailed when attention is paid to the human and to the creativeness that, with constraint, constitutes the human condition. Ruth Benedict incorporated the balance into professional work that was powerfully popular in appeal.

I became a Benedictian anthropologist. This involved, to some extent, recognizing the affinities between a biographical and an anthropological approach. Becoming an anthropologist involved, for me as for Ruth
Ruth never forgot that her personal struggles and movements toward understanding characterized the human condition. Out of this came an anthropological perspective and, unshakably, an attention to the ‘ordinary person.’

Benedict, charting a way through the observer-observed problem. Like my subject, I believed an inquiry included the observer and could finally be justified because the observer claimed a commitment to the “observed.” I also shared Ruth’s view that self-awareness both sharpened inquiry and provided some guard against plodding thoughtlessly through the life of another. Curiosity inspires the task; a sense of one’s self can channel the curiosity, preserving integrity of observer and observed. Ruth convinced me of the connection between personal engagement and a researcher’s responsibility.

My generation of anthropologists has little interest in “salvage ethnography” and increasing doubts about traditional categories of cultural description. Current efforts to redefine goals and methods bring us back to Ruth Benedict. Absorbed in her life story, I realized how inevitably social scientists today must acknowledge her point of view. Those who, like me, adopt her approach do so because she suits a contemporary world-society and because she incorporated into passionately committed statements the historically proven precepts of her discipline.

Through her living and her writings, Ruth Benedict contributed to the intellectual milieu which we — anthropologists, feminists, both or neither — still inhabit. She argued for “individualized wisdom” and ideas tested in experience. This fostered a humility and a justice in her inquiries we would do well to attend to, whatever our positions.

I have not written the biography of a “remarkable woman” or an “anthropological genius.” Rather, I write of the ongoing combination of those two in Ruth’s experiences and in her perspectives. In the following chapters I have outlined, for her, the parameters of a “search for truth.”

The life of Ruth Benedict seems to me one of extraordinary, enduring, and often fierce commitment. She made a commitment to exploring and conveying the terms of living, to specifying the unfolding theme in any individual pattern. She began with herself, straining to realize the motives in her own life, and never entirely banished herself from inquiries. Fantasies and daydreams, fiction and sonnets gave way to ethnographies, theories of folklore, public speeches, and propaganda, but Ruth kept the quest and the energy of her belief in educating, in visions, and in changes. I detect an urgency in her living, from the earliest, private drafts of a story to the public writings of her last years. The voice is consistent.

Her contribution extends beyond anthropology, beyond feminism and broader political statements. Ruth’s contribution has to do with a resolution of private debates in a public encounter and a thoughtful professionalism. Her impulses and the modes of resolution remained rooted in her interpretation of the “woman issue” in American culture.

Contribution seems finally too small a word to cover the significance of Ruth Benedict to a contemporary world. Her significance comes from her construct of a design for living in an effort she did not separate from the construction of an anthropology. Ruth never forgot that her personal struggles and movements toward understanding characterized the human condition. Out of this came an anthropological perspective and, unshakably, an attention to the “ordinary person” wherever that person lived and however she or he “recast the universe.”

Ruth Benedict believed that each one of us can create the terms of an existence, can individually take the initiative of imagining a better world. I hope in my biography to have conveyed her vision of human potential and its sources in a lived experience.

The girl thrown away forever: memories of a princess

From class president to princess. From Vassar valedictorian to volunteer nurse. From independence to security. From one century to another, Sutematsu Yamakawa’s life resonates like a story by Henry James.

by Megan Baldridge Murray

Quarterly readers may remember this elegiac paragraph in the Person Place & Thing column of the Summer 1980 issue:

“Seeking memories of a princess. Sutematsu Yamakawa, later Princess Oyama, who graduated from Vassar in 1882 as valedictorian of her class, is thought to be the first Japanese woman to be educated outside of Japan. Because of her importance in the history of Japanese women, her great-granddaughter is trying to write a book to preserve her story for future generations and seeks to meet or hear from descendants of the class of ’82. Any information should be sent to: Akiko Kuno, 1-20-19-204, Miyanosaka, Setagayaku, Tokyo, Japan.”

The inquiry was part of an extensive historical hunt organized by Mrs. Kuno, a 40-year-old Tokyo woman who is writing a book about her great-grandmother: a princess, a samurai daughter, a beloved and brilliant member of her college class, and Vassar’s first Japanese graduate.

No Rip Van Winkles were awoke by the Quarterly notice, but, with the assistance of the AAVC staff and several other alumnae, Mrs. Kuno was able to follow up on some leads and discovered the names of several descendants from among Sutematsu’s

Megan Baldridge Murray is a 1976 graduate of Yale University, where she majored in Japanese Language and Literature. She is working in New York as a part-time correspondent for several Japanese magazines, and beginning a career as an English-language general features writer. An alumna of the Madeira School in Virginia, she has her own story about the first time she tied together Vassar and Japan. When she was a Madeira junior, a delegation of Japanese photographers and writers from a general features magazine in Tokyo came down to the school and photographed the students for two days, “without stop, as the Japanese are apt to do.” They were filming a magazine story about Daddy Long-legs, the popular novel by Jean Webster McKinney ’01 that takes place at Vassar. “The delegation had already been in Poughkeepsie and decided that Vassar just didn’t look like Vassar to them. What they wanted was a school where everyone wore a uniform and brown oxfords. So they eschewed truth for image.”

American friends. On a trip to the United States during the summer of 1982, she recovered letters that her great-grandmother had written to friends in this country — documents she had thought were lost. At Vassar, she also found an extensive collection of photographs of her forebear, as well as dozens of articles about her published in newspapers such as the Sunday Advertiser and the New York Times.

Sutematsu (pronounced 'Stematsu') Yamakawa, the princess in this Japanese-American fairy tale, was one of the brainiest members of 1882. During her sophomore, junior, and senior years, she served as class president and president of the Philaletheis Society (a drama group), and was a feared player of chess and whist. In her senior year, she was one of six students chosen to read their theses aloud to guests at graduation. Upon returning to Japan, she married Japan’s war minister, and, owing to her husband’s honors, she eventually became a marchioness, a countess, and finally a princess.

Sutematsu’s story is the more unusual because she was the first Japanese woman to graduate from college. Until the twentieth century, there were no colleges for women in Japan; had she been the average young daughter of wealthy samurai parents, she would have been sent to a school run by temple priests, where she would have learned the fundamentals of reading and writing, and adding and subtracting on an abacus. Or, if her family could have af-

Sutematsu Yamakawa, V.C. 1882, during her Vassar years

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forded it, she would have had a private
tutor work with her at home. The main part
of her learning would have been Confucian-
ist philosophy to prepare her to be an
obedient wife and a good mother.

Sutematsu was different. As a member of
a mission sponsored by the Japanese
government, she was one of five girls who
were sent to the United States to get an
American education. The fact that a Japan-
ese was even allowed to leave her native
land in the 1870s can be traced back to the
forced opening of Japan in 1853 by Ameri-
can ship captain Commodore Matthew
Perry. Although for centuries before
Perry’s arrival Japan had been a feudal
state with isolationist policies, after his visit
it quickly changed its course and became
eager to learn from the West. Missions sud-
denly were sent to Germany to study the
famed Teutonic army, to England to study
their system of law, and to America to study
the government and American
women. While it was the Japanese consul
in Washington, D.C., who thought of spon-
soring a mission of young Japanese girls to
study in America, Emperor Meiji, who had
replaced the Shōgun as Japan’s leader,
strongly supported the idea. “My country is
now undergoing a complete change
from old to new ideas, which I sincerely desire,”
he wrote, “and therefore (I) call upon all
wise and strong-minded to appear and be
come good guides to the Government. . . .
Females heretofore have had no position
socially, because it was considered they
were without understanding; but if edu-
cated and intelligent, they should have due
respect.”

The educational experiment was intended
to train better educated women to be better
educated mothers. According to a nine-
teenth-century American historian, a con-
temporary American historian writing
about Japan noted that “While children
under ten years of age were wholly under
the influence of their mothers, it was, of
course, of the utmost importance that they
should be educated. As a little leaven
leavens the whole lump, so would the edu-
cation of women elevate the people of
Japan.” A century later, Japanese women
have a number of all-women and coed col-
leges to pick from.

Still, some women, such as Sutematsu’s
great-granddaughter, Mrs. Kuno, who
graduated in 1964 from Keio University,
continue to further their education in the
United States. Mrs. Kuno was an exchange
student at Stanford for one summer, and
decided to stay for the following year at
Hope College in Michigan. She says that
the experience gave her a lot of confidence
and helped her fluency in English as well.

“The greatest difference I noticed between
Japanese women and American women was
that American women seemed to have an
opinion about absolutely everything,” she
says. “I had to learn to speak up.”

When Mrs. Kuno was homesick during
her year and a summer in America, she
took strength from the thought of Sute-
matu’s ten-year-absence from Japan.
It began with six years in New Haven prior
to Vassar, with an American, the
Bacons. Sutematsu’s government-spon-
sored mission included five girls under the
age of 12 (Sutematsu herself was twelve),
sent to live with exemplary American
families in order to learn about American
culture first hand, and to prepare for an
American college.

There were 14 children in the Bacon
household. Paterfamilias Leonard Bacon,
who had been chosen as Sutematsu’s host
by the Japanese consulate in Washington,
was a minister of New Haven’s Center
Church (his tenure there would last 40
years), a professor at the Yale Divinity
School, and one of the city’s most liberal
citizens, well known for his strong anti-
slavery views. His youngest child, Alice,
was about Sutematsu’s age, and the two
considered each other sisters. It was a
friendship each would cherish all her life.
Marian Whitney, a neighbor of the Bacons
and, through them, a life-long friend of
Sutematsu’s, remembered years later that
Sutematsu was a welcome addition to the
area, “a slender, graceful little creature, full
of life and spirit and willing to take part in
every game; a swift runner, a good climber,
and later a marvelous swimmer.”

Mrs. Bacon, an invalid, took charge of
teaching Sutematsu English. And the visitor
became acculturated in other ways. During
the summers, Sutematsu would get together
with Japanese girls in New Haven, and in
Washington, D.C., for visits to Montréal.

Akiko Kuno was moved to embark on a
book about her great-grandmother so that
her countrywomen might be inspired, as she
was, by an example of a strong Japanese
woman. She started her research at home,
interviewing family members about the
Sutematsu stories they had heard, and
recording their recollections. Alas, all of
Sutematsu’s possessions were destroyed
during World War II.

Mrs. Kuno’s next step was to get in touch
with AAVC, where Sutematsu’s story
piqued the attention of Mary Meeker Gesek
’58, AAVC’s associate director for clubs.
Mrs. Gesek put Mrs. Kuno in touch with alumnae and college staff in positions to
further her research. “Every now and
then,” she says, “I find in my mail folder a
request from some third- or fourth-genera-
tion descendant trying to research a Vassar
relative. That kind of assistance is pretty
straightforward. But Sutematsu’s was not
the run-of-the-mill story. The fact that her
family history had been destroyed meant
that Mrs. Kuno was starting over in many
ways. But Luckily for us, those were the
days when women kept mementos, saved
letters, and put together scrapbooks.” In-
deed, there was so much material on the
princess in Vassar’s Special Collections that
Mrs. Kuno couldn’t examine it all.

Mrs. Gesek also points out that lacking
the help of Grace Lewis Case ‘25, the search
for information about Princess Oyama’s
life in the States would have ended with
Vassar. Mrs. Case, a writer (she has been
1925’s Quarterly correspondent for 21 of
the past 26 years), and a long-time resident
of New Haven, was instrumental in dis-
covering information about Sutematsu’s
earliest American years. “I thought she
would be intrigued by the story and inter-
ested in finding someone who would help
us puzzle it together,” Mrs. Gesek says.
Mrs. Case began research in the Yale library
to find out more about the Bacon family, and
she contacted Bacon descendants to see if
they knew of Sutematsu. By “a great deal of
luck,” Mrs. Case insists, one of the
descendants gave her a photocopy of a
newspaper article that led to the discovery
of a local amateur historian and free-lance
writer who had been researching the Bacon
family.

— M.B.M.
At her wedding, attended by 1,000 guests, Sutematsu shook hands with each Westerner but bowed six times to each Japanese family. "It was a feat that would have killed an American woman," one friend later wrote.

Niagara, Watkins Glen. An American educator recalled in a newspaper account that the girls were adapting to American life, for example, by abandoning the use of pomatum in their hair so as to arrange it in the "American bushy style."

Following her graduation from New Haven High School, Sutematsu was enrolled at Vassar probably because Mrs. Bacon's brother-in-law, B.G. Northrop, was the president of the college. Sutematsu's only problem with English by this time was a slight lisping when she pronounced 'th.' Besides being elected president of her class at Vassar three years in a row, and becoming president of the Philatelic Society, she was a member of the Shakespeare Club — "confined to students of serious literary tastes and interests," as a newspaper put it — and served as a marshal on Founder's Day. In a class photograph, she is shown sitting amidst a group of individualists, girls with befeathered and bellowed hats. Sutematsu looks attractive and serious, with bangs and her hair pulled back. "A beautiful Jewess of poetic type," one classmate described her looks. Her mind also compelled notice. Helen Hiscock Backus (V.C. 1873) of the English department would later recall: "In my extensive acquaintance with young women as students, I know of not one more interesting in her spirit and natural gifts. She was a rare student, and in her social relations, unconsciously to herself, charmed all with her personality."

While Sutematsu became a thoroughly Americanized Vassar girl, she also stayed in contact with her family. Indeed, many accounts of her life stress the fact that her mother never approved the departure for America. At the time Sutematsu left Japan, the girl was living temporarily with some missionaries in the north while her mother settled in Tokyo, and it is possible that Sutematsu herself, or one of her siblings, made the arrangements for her new life without the mother's knowledge. There's no question of the mother's distress at the news: she changed her daughter's name from Sachiko (literally, little blossom) to Sutematsu (literally, thrown-away pine tree. In Japan, the pine tree is the symbol of eternity, so a fuller translation of "Sutematsu" would be "thrown away forever"). Sutematsu did write to her brothers and sisters from America; whether she and her mother stayed in contact, no one knows.

During her Vassar years, Sutematsu kept up her Japanese by practicing with a compatriot from the mission, Shige Nagai (V.C. 1881, music division. She never received an A.B.). Classmates noted that Sutematsu forced the good-natured, somewhat lazy Shige to speak Japanese during once-a-week meetings so that the two would not forget their native tongue. Sutematsu's deep feelings for her country were also demonstrated in her school work. Her thesis, which she read aloud at graduation, was on "British Foreign Policy Toward Japan." A New York Times account of the ceremonies praised Sutematsu's "prophetic insights," and her point of view must have been pleasing to many in the audience; she criticized British policy toward Japan, and applauded America for its liberalism.

After graduation, Sutematsu returned to New Haven for several months, and studied nursing at the Connecticut Training School for Nurses; such study would help her, she thought, in whatever career she chose back home. Then, she said farewell to America — she would never see it again — and sailed back.

After a rough, three-week trip on the high seas, Sutematsu was met at Tokyo Bay by a group of family and friends. Ever the student of literature, her first impression of her reacquaintance with Japan reminded her of Gulliver's Travels: "I had ridden in a jinrickisha ('jin' means person, so 'jinrickisha' meansrickshaw) before I left Japan," she wrote, "yet, when I was put into the overgrown baby carriage and whirled away through the narrow streets lined on either side with tiny houses I felt as if I were visiting Lilliput." After a first lunch of Japanese delicacies, she noted with joy that "skill in using the chopsticks seems to be inherited and the last thing to be forgotten by Japanese otherwise denationalized." She also wrote to friends that her Japanese was serviceable: "As soon as I touched my native soil my tongue seemed to be loosened, as it were, and though I spoke bad Japanese, I could make all my wants known and converse with my family very easily." After two months, Sutematsu had no problems understanding and speaking her native language, but she was functionally illiterate. She had never learned to read or write the language's thousands of many-stroked characters.

In the late nineteenth century, Japan was no paradise for a single woman like Sutematsu: a Japanese woman of her age and samurai background was, by custom, expected to be married young. Because she was from a good family that was poor — her father had died before she was born — it was expected that her family would plan an arranged marriage for her. When talking to Vassar friends about her return to Japan, however, Sutematsu always emphasized her
commitment to career and to teaching Japan about American customs and culture. She voiced no interest in rushing into a marriage. But soon after her return, she wrote to Alice Bacon and to Jessie Wheeler (one of 1882's indefatigable correspondents) that her Japanese friends were actively matchmaking on her behalf and that she was desperate for her future. Although she had written many letters to the Ministry of Education hoping to get a job through them, because she was a woman and couldn't read or write Japanese there were no jobs to be had.

Fate stepped in. Soon after her return, Japan's Minister of War, Iwao Oyama, became interested in Sutematsu, having seen her on several social occasions. A widower 18 years her senior, with three children from his first marriage, he had spent two happy years in France at the Ecole Militaire in Paris, and hoped to remarry an educated wife. When he sent Sutematsu's family a proposal, they refused the offer because Oyama had once fought in a battle against their samurai clan. Sutematsu made the final decision to accept Oyama, however, perhaps because she realized that she had a better chance of becoming influential by conforming to the rules and taking a powerful husband.

They were married in a private ceremony, followed by a ball to which 800 Japanese and 200 Westerners were invited. Her dismayed American friends noted that Sutematsu shook hands with each Westerner there, but bowed six times to each Japanese — although they added that six bows sufficed for a whole family. One friend wrote in a newspaper account of the party, "It was a feat that would have killed an American woman." At the dinner following the ball, the female Japanese guests, unaccustomed to Western social events, were inadvertently left behind when the bridal party and Westerners adjourned to dine. Her Vassar manner coming to the fore, Sutematsu went back to shepherd the women into dinner.

By all public accounts it was a happy marriage, and Sutematsu was too busy to need a career. Soon after the wedding, Oyama left for a business trip to Europe, and she began to take care of his affairs. The couple lived in a Western-style, red-

Letter from Tokyo, 1983

Jorge Ribeiro

Four years ago, many Japanese spent Sunday evenings watching a controversial TV soap opera. Its focus was a newly married couple and the wife's mother-in-law: the husband had to decide whether he and his wife would live with his parents, or move to a new place. The young wife was modern, feisty, and, in the eyes of older viewers, a bit selfish. She wanted a place of her own. Modernization, westernization, individualization, liberation — call it what you will, something motivated the young man to opt for moving out, and Japan hasn't been the same since.

Marriage in Japan means continuing the family line and the society. It is a necessity and a social responsibility. The idea of a proper marriageable age for men and women persists, especially in the countryside (any area outside Tokyo). My students all marvel over the fact that I'm 28, unmarried, and not even worrying about it. To remain unmarried is a social stigma, and a marriage without children is seen as lonely. So, when young people move out of the family home, it not only bothers the old, but also tugs at the very glue of the society.

The idea of the nuclear family has not completely changed traditional thinking yet, however. The traditional man, after inquiring the continuation of his line, is then free to find pleasure and release in extra marital affairs, mistresses, and massage parlors, or even in just carousing with male colleagues after work while the wife stays at home. One's wife is the mother of one's family, and not the type of woman one might socialize with in the outside world.

Still, the tables are turning in an ironical twist that nature seems to adore. Pushed relentlessly by an escalator system that begins its ascent very early in their lives, many young Japanese men find themselves on their wedding nights facing women who know more than they do. Polls reveal that modern young Japanese women are surprisingly more experienced sexually than young Japanese men. This has resulted in passive, feminized, neurotic young men, according to local newspapers. Travel agencies which plan honeymoon travel packages have had to supply impromptu counseling as part of the arrangements on some occasions.

For women, a pristine image continues to be necessary. Most unmarried women live at home, and are expected to be back in the house by nine at night lest the neighbors talk, even though big city life, with its cloak of anonymity, has helped relax such anxieties to some degree. Promoters breathed a sigh of relief when pop star Momoe Yamaguchi, photographed with her skirts up in a breeze, was found to be wearing white underwear. A young woman herself, her image, geared to the affluent junior and senior high-school crowd, would have been shattered had she been caught wearing a "naughty, sophisticated" color such as black. But one can imagine parents' concern when lingerie companies noted an increase in sales of front-catch brassieres among young Tokyo "office ladies" ("OLs"). The speculation was that these bras come off more quickly than conventional styles, thus suggesting casual sex. In Japan, image is all-important.

Japanese women now find themselves in the peculiar situation of having both more and less freedom than Japanese men. On one hand, women are free to pursue hobbies and interests, to travel abroad and broaden their thinking; they needn't live the narrow, regimented life of the organization man, a life most Japanese men can't avoid. On the other hand, the women are pushed into being housewives and mothers with little chance of a successful, stimulating career. The same force that gives them the chance to explore the world at large excludes them from the working world at home.

Despite all the cultural pressure to marry, these days marriage doesn't seem to be meeting many women's needs. Workaholic husbands whose companies are adopting a shorter, five-day work week have created weekend neuroses in their wives, ranging from headaches to anemia; she can't face the prospect of having him home on weekends. As the divorce rate creeps upwards, another fact is emerging: 95 percent of divorced Japanese men hope to remarry, while only 50 percent of the women do. (The Japanese view this as confirmation of widespread "mother complexes" among the men.)

Japan sees its modern history as divided into two parts, before and after World War II. Men, especially the older politicians who run the country, tend to be before-the-war types — traditional and feudalistic. Women, in comparison, tend to be after-the-war types — modern, liberal, democratic. They've come a long way, but having started from so far behind they have a long way to go. Their major task is to pull Japanese men — who will, I'm sure, resist, kicking and screaming every inch of the way — into the post-War world.

— Jorge Ribeiro '75
“What can I say that will be of interest to you? Do you care to hear why I discharged one of my servants or that I have had some military officers to dinner or that my youngest boy was very stupid at lessons or that my silk worms are not doing well on account of the cold weather.”

brick house, furnished with what one visitor called a “rather florid” style of furniture that Oyama had bought in France. The Oyama’s three children — Hisa, a girl, and two boys, Takashi and Kashiwa — lived more traditionally in a Japanese-style wing.

Sutematsu’s life was far from uneventful. Besides mothering her step-children and raising her own, she lived through three wars with Russia and China in which her husband, dubbed the “Napoleon” of Japan, was commander of Japanese troops, often traveling to remote parts of Manchuria and China. Like those of her husband, Sutematsu’s interests revolved around war activities. She was one of Tokyo’s most active volunteers. As director of the Ladies Relief Association and the Ladies Volunteer Nursing Association, president of the Ladies Patriotic Association, and chairman of the Japanese Red Cross Society, she set an example. (Eventually, conflict took its toll: in 1907, her beloved son Takashi was blown up at sea.)

Sutematsu showed other Japanese women that volunteer nursing was not menial, an idea new to Japan. In a 1905 article for the American magazine Collier’s, she wrote: “You cannot realize how earnest the ladies of our upper classes are unless you know their life intimately. They who never dressed themselves without maids waiting on them, they who never held in their hands anything heavier than their handkerchiefs, they who never went outside of their houses without two or three attendants, all come alone to the hospital with their little lunch baskets and bundles containing their nurses’ uniforms.” She also helped raise funds and organize an English-language school for young girls that was headed by one of the other Japanese graduates of the girls’ mission. Her friend Alice Bacon came to Japan to teach at the school.

Yet, as full as Sutematsu’s days were, one can find glimpses of what appears to be vexation. For the 20-year reunion book compiled by her Vassar classmates, she wrote: “As for myself, what can I say that will be of interest to you? Do you care to hear why I discharged one of my servants or that I have engaged new ones, or that I have had some military officers to dinner who talked shop all the time, or that my youngest boy was very stupid at lessons and I lost my patience or that my silk worms which I am rearing are not doing well on account of the cold weather, or that I am bothered out of my life with all sorts of societies, clubs and associations which send me letters by reams, etc.” There were the rubs and restrictions of being a Japanese wife. Sutematsu’s husband forbade her to write letters to the United States, because, he explained, he was afraid she would let out military secrets. Her husband’s rank also demanded that they live more expensively than they could really afford. Sutematsu’s childhood friend Marian Whitney described one excurciating, twentieth-century visit to the theater in Tokyo with Sutematsu: “She did not often visit the theater, where her rank required her to occupy an expensive box and give handsome fees to the attendants. She agreed to go with us one night ‘incognito,’ thinking she would not be recognized in the background of our little box, but before the performance was over the proprietor and his wife appeared, prostrating themselves at her feet, protesting their horror that they had not done proper honor to so lofty a personage who should have had the best place in their humble theater, etc. Madame Oyama was half amused and half distressed, but she would not go with us again.”

Apart from this, however, Whitney had a delightful visit, and reported that Sutematsu was one of Tokyo’s grandes dames. She tells of being taken aside by a “brilliant young German officer and diplomat, the aide of Prince Henry of Prussia,” who told her, “I always wonder what these little Japanese ladies are thinking about. They look so intelligent and listen so attentively to everything that is said, but it is almost impossible to get them to express an opinion or enter into a discussion. I envy you the chance of talking freely with such a woman as the Marchioness Oyama, for I have often felt that her opinion on Japanese affairs would be most interesting and valuable.” But, as Whitney remarked, it was not proper etiquette for a Japanese woman to talk about “public affairs” in public in Japan. Imagine how stifling the unspoken rules of that society must have been for one of Vassar’s stars! The great

class correspondent Jessie Wheeler also visited and enjoyed herself very much, writing, with respect to the use of chopsticks, “Due to much practice with castanets in my youth I had little difficulty in feeding myself.”

Many of Sutematsu’s classmates were not to see their illustrious president again. Although she had hoped, someday, to revisit the United States, she never had a chance. In 1916, her husband died, and in 1918, she died of influenza. Six years later, Sutematsu’s class paid tribute to her by constructing a Japanese room at Vassar. They decorated it with what Japanese furniture they could find, and Shige Nagai, the former mission girl who had attended Vassar’s music division, sent on a formal court kimono once owned by Sutematsu to display in the room. (After the room was disassembled in the 1960s, the kimono was sent to the Japan Society in New York. Unfortunately, the society was unable to find it during Mrs. Kuno’s recent American trip.)

In the past few years in Japan, interest in Sutematsu has been on the increase, fueled, no doubt, by Mrs. Kuno’s enthusiasm and the wealth of information she has unearthed. Already, there has been one Japanese TV feature about Sutematsu, entitled Bright Star of Dawn. In it, Mrs. Kuno narrated Sutematsu’s story, and illustrated it with the photographs, articles, and letters she received in the United States. In addition, a fictionalized TV series based on Sutematsu’s life has been running for the past several months on a major network. Perhaps Japanese TV will lure more Japanese students to Poughkeepsie. It would be a beneficial cross-fertilization. As Helen Backus wrote in a 1910 issue of the Vassar Miscellany, “Since Japanese men following the stars in their courses have astonished even their friendliest critics, need we doubt that the educated Japanese woman will fulfill her great opportunities? At present our own American solution of social and economic problems seems often lame and unsatisfactory. Let us take heart of grace from their hopeful phases as revealed in the New-Old World in a glorious fruitage of American seed-thoughts blown to the fertile gardens of the Japanese capital.”
When time means volunteers

Wanted: Special events manager with proven experience in designing informative and entertaining programs that will draw a highly educated, discerning public. Broad contacts with speakers, solid experience in marketing, promotion, and budgeting, as well as innate instinct for what the public wants. Unlimited opportunities for leadership and growth.

It reads like a typical Wall Street Journal ad, or a listing from the files of an executive recruitment firm — but it really describes a theoretical volunteer position with a local Vassar club. For “special events manager” read “chairman of programs” or “benefit chairman.” And for the skills, look out for a public relations professional, perhaps, or a conference planner for a nonprofit organization, or even a superb party giver. What’s important for your volunteers is that their skills should match the jobs they’ll be performing . . . and, above all, that they’re good at delegating. Think beyond what titles appear on their résumés.

Like the best executive recruiters, Vassar clubs should draw up job descriptions for the committee slots they must fill, think in terms of functional résumés as they analyze their needs, identify the talent and experience required to turn an idea into a successful project, and then seek out the right volunteer for the job. Nor does it matter how many hours a person can contribute. In a world where time is a four-letter word, a new flexibility is required, both from potential recruits who are afraid to “get involved” because their days are so busy and from the organizations that worry about how they can attract such busy people.

Individuals and organizations need to be more discriminating in the way they apportion volunteer time, and more discerning about the value of that time. Quality counts. Some people can contribute more in a few hours, or quarter hours, than others can in weeks of meetings. The president of one national voluntary organization, known for the commitment of volunteer service it expects of its members, recently remarked: “The advocate who spends 45 minutes calling three state legislators and persuading them to change their votes to support a key bill affecting children has achieved more with her time than a roomful of administrators who are wondering how they should penalize members who don’t ‘do their fair share’ of the work.”

We need to think of new rules and roles for volunteers. Over the dinner table one night recently, a very bright young woman, the president of her own consulting firm, described how she had tackled a demanding volunteer assignment:

“When they asked me to chair the grants committee, I told them my time was limited, but that I would gladly do it as long as I could approach the work in my own way. I warned them that it might not look as if the committee were accomplishing anything, but that we would get the funding they needed — and by the time they needed it. So I made a few calls, identified potential sources of funding for us to go after, worked by phone on the outline for a grant proposal with two committee members who are wonderful at writing, and assigned various people on the committee the job of contacting foundations. Everyone in the group is busy, but by giving each person one small assignment, no one felt overloaded. P.S.: We got the grant!”

This volunteer knew that she could draw upon a lifetime of experience and contacts to make a valuable contribution to the organization she cared about. She also knew how to divide up responsibilities to reduce her own and everyone else’s work load, and give her entire committee a feeling of shared leadership. That it took her only about an hour or two a week to get the project under way, delegate responsibility, and stay in touch with her committee didn’t fill her with guilt or, worse yet, cause her to think she had “nothing to give.” “We’ve had two committee meetings in six months,” she triumphantly told her dinner companions, “one at the beginning of the year to get acquainted, discuss goals and priorities, and review our respective skills and the way we would operate, and the second after we got the grant to decide what to do next, and celebrate what we had accomplished.” The group that benefited so immensely from this volunteer’s limited but valuable time is also to be applauded for having the vision to match her skills and experience with the job, regardless of her unorthodox approach to committee work.

What about the positions that demand even greater responsibility, such as service on a board of directors or even the presidency of a club? Here, too, the volunteer organizations that will thrive in the years ahead are making their top leadership jobs more feasible for busy members. The New York Vassar Club pared down the demands made on its presidents by dividing up responsibility for the club’s working committees among different members of the executive committee, rather than requiring the president to oversee every committee personally. Each committee chairman now reports to an officer whose past board experience or particular expertise matches the functions performed by that committee. This new system has lightened the supervisory role carried by the president, and, as the opening ad says, has given more people greater opportunities for leadership and growth.

The Mad Hatter could be talking about the proper care of volunteers, or both sexes, when he has this exchange with Alice on time.

"I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."

"If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s him . . . he won’t stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he’d do almost anything you’d like with the clock."

15
Aspects of the Present

by Margaret Mead and Rhoda (Bubendey) Metraux '34
Morrow, 319 pages, 1980
$10.95 hardcover

This is a collection of short essays which originally appeared in Redbook magazine between 1969 and 1979. As the title indicates, they are Margaret Mead's reflections on the contemporary scene, informed by her personal experience as well as by her and Ms. Metraux's anthropological studies. Ms. Metraux previously acted as Mead's collaborator on several other books.

Most topical material tends to date badly, but these essays have survived the lapse of time and the transition to hard covers remarkably well; their qualities of freshness, balance, and insight remain intact. Some of the comments, in fact, seem more relevant today than when they were written, as, for example, this one from a 1976 article: “Today it seems to me that rather than trying to find ways through which people can overcome the handicaps of poverty so that fewer among us will be trapped by it in the next generation, we are attempting, abolishing the services to the poor, to abolish the poor. And in so doing we ensure that they will be more helpless in a hostile world.”

The use of “we” — rather than, say, “the Administration” or “the Republicans” — is revealing. The authors see contemporary problems in terms of the attitudes of society at large, rather than as battlegrounds of politicians and pressure groups, and they write about how we think and what we can do, rather than of decisions imposed on us from above. Their insistence that solutions are within our grasp — and are our responsibility — is a useful corrective to the sense of helplessness and frustration which many of us feel when confronting complex problems. On the subject of the inadequacies of primary education, they cut through the buck-passing and the bickering over methods with the flat statement, “Children have learned to read by being beaten — and by learning their letters from cookies coated with honey. As long as the society — and so the teachers and parents — expect children to be able to learn, they will learn.”

Children are perhaps the central concern here, and child-rearing and the family are topics which recur throughout the book. The authors believe that the prevalent family arrangement — the single-family household — puts a heavy burden on parents, and isolates both parents and children. A change in housing patterns is proposed to bring different generations and life-styles into proximity, so that the old would not be shut out of the family, and the rigid division between families and singles would be eased. This would make possible a sharing of parental duties, as well as companionship, and thus would alleviate the loneliness of those outside the family, while lightening the responsibilities of those within it.

The essays in Aspects of the Present cover a broad range of topics. There are articles on the women's movement, abortion, busing, as well as less weighty pieces on U.F.O.s, the Woodstock festival, summer camp — and a particularly fine one on Halloween and the decline of mischief. This book, Mead's last, is a fitting example of her lucidity, fairness, compassion, and optimism.

David Linzée '74

Stop Hurting!
Start Living!
The Pain Control Book
by Jane Whitbread '36
Delacorte Press, 240 pages
1981, $12.95 hardcover

If you suffer from chronic pain and your doctors have been unable to diagnose an organic or traumatic cause for your continued misery, read this book. It may just offer amelioration, if not the solution, for your problem. Within a mix of specific success stories, journalistic description of pain control centers, and a great deal of how-to information, Jane Whitbread explains the developments in holistic health care settings that have successfully treated many chronic back and head pain patients. Holistic means whole body-mind relationships within the natural and technological setting of the human group. Although Ms. Whitbread's book and the clinics and treatments she describes do not promise to end pain, they do teach one how to overcome it and curtail its crippling effects. As in all mind-body therapies, the desire to change and exert control over circumstances rather than to continue present misery (which, after all, has its own rewards), is paramount. As Ms. Whitbread writes: “Anyone can do what they did. No electronic gadgets. No gurus. No wonder drugs. No miracles of modern medicine. No magical medicos. These people cured themselves. They learned to kick the pain habit with the help of doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, and each other at the treatment centers for chronic pain.”

According to the author, most pain control centers suggest that the sufferer be wary of drugs prescribed to suppress chronic pain, for the body is not continually responsive to them. At half the people who reach a chronic pain treatment program are heavily addicted to tranquilizers and narcotics; many take 75 percent more than recommended levels. At the clinics, drugs are replaced by relaxation techniques, behavior modification relative to exercise and activity, appropriate family interactions, and the encouragement of self-help groups.

Although the pain control clinic movement is barely ten years old, the heavy involvement of and endorsement by medical specialists has made the programs eligible for insurance coverage, and the author provides considerable material on anticipated cost-effective outcomes for both employers and insurance companies.

Even so, the pain control clinics and their intensive time commitment may be too costly for many sufferers, and a significant part of the book offers step-by-step directions for self-treatment.

Jane Whitbread (Levin) began her career as a journalist at Vassar, where she was editor of the Miscellany News. A former member of the New York Times Magazine staff and a medical columnist for McCaill's she has also been an editor of this magazine. She has not suffered from chronic
The Art of Political Thinking

by William Welch
edited by Katherine Welch '42
Littlefield and Adams (Totowa, NJ)
225 pages, 1981, $4.95 paper

Is there an “art” to political thinking that is different from political “science”? William Welch thinks so, and explains it in this elegant little book. The art of political thinking involves a reasoned examination of contemporary issues through the lens of the fundamental political principles upon which the nation was founded, a return to basics. The book carefully lays out this idea, and applies the art to three contemporary issues.

Until his death, Welch was a political science professor at the University of Colorado. The book was completed and edited by his wife, Katherine. Happily, a unity of form and content has been maintained.

While most books in academic social science remain hopelessly mired in obfuscating jargon, Welch’s prose demystifies political concepts in a book intended for the general reader as much as for introductory social science classes. Both political thinking and Welch’s narrative are “clarifying,” “ordering,” and “reasoning.”

Welch applies his notion of political thinking to three controversial issues: abortion, discrimination against homosexuals in employment, and Vietnam. I was, at first, afraid that these three case studies might seem dated to the contemporary student, relics of the ’60s and ’70s. But with the Helms and Hyde amendments threatening individual choice, the rights of gays and lesbians to equal access to employment eroded, and our President flirting with armed intervention in Central America, these issues retain a striking immediacy.

In each case, Welch applies a moderately liberal position, always mindful of the fragility of the relationship between the individual and the state. On abortion, he argues that the proper function of government is to protect individual right to choose; therefore, abortion must remain legal and available. Though he believes that government must ensure equal opportunity, he is unconvinced that gays and lesbians are discriminated against as such, and therefore argues for a “limited affirmative action” that excludes homosexuals. Finally, he maintains that government has an obligation to provide security for its citizens, but not the license to jeopardize citizens’ lives for questionable causes. There must be a clear and immediate threat to national security (not evident in Vietnam) before armed intervention can be sanctioned.

Welch concludes that government has been “overzealous in its efforts to provide equality and security” while ignoring its primary function of “protecting the liberty of the individual.” Both problems, he believes, can best be solved by streamlining the state, getting it out of our and other nations’ backyards.

Welch’s book is careful and convincing, as far as it goes. Yet it seems to address only half the problem. Welch uncritically accepts the Lockean notion of the minimal state, whose purpose is the protection of the individual. But an adequate political theory must fuse Locke with Rousseau; government must “provide safety and security for the individual” and simultaneously express the community that underlies national political life. The body politic is more than an aggregation of its parts, just as a physical body is more than a collection of individual muscles and bones.

It is particularly difficult to espouse an undiluted Lockean political theory today if we apply the art of political thinking to contemporary political events. The minimal state sanctions imperial military adventures under the guise of national security; perpetuates inequalities based on gender, race, class, and sexual preference under the guise of providing an unfeathered environment for individual achievement; and stalls meaningful reforms under the guise of restraint against meddling in individual life. To argue, as Welch does, that gays and lesbians do not have a legitimate claim to equal employment opportunity enforces the very social homogeneity that the Lockean state was sworn to oppose. To choose an alternative sexual orientation ought not to mean to choose discrimination; even the minimal state must protect the individual’s right to be different.

The Art of Political Thinking is a thoughtful book that shows both the promise and the limits of liberal political theory. To start and end with the individual as the centerpiece of political theory almost inevitably produces an internally inconsistent, contradictory theory. The art of political thinking must stretch our political imaginations beyond individual happiness to social definitions of justice. Even if it is not the final word on the subject, Welch’s book is a superb place to begin our political education.

—Michael Kimmel '72

Michael Kimmel is a free-lance writer and currently a professor of sociology at Rutgers University.

Crafts: A Career Alternative

by Carol S. Kushner '68-'69
Julian Messner
(a division of Simon & Schuster)
127 pages, 1981, $9.29 hardcover

For those who long to “create something beautiful” by making fiber pieces, working in stained glass, exploring the medium of leather, throwing pots and adorning them with whimsical creatures, creating colorfully decorated tee shirts or intricate metal jewelry, designing functional pieces in wood, or by becoming a maker of brooms and other household objects in the early American style — Carol Kushner has written an instructional book. It will tell you everything you want to know about a few people who have chosen this way of life; their tools, training, skills, products, life style, and more.

—Frances Schwartz '78

Frances Schwartz lives in New York City and teaches English at the Chapin School.
Gourmards and/or gourmets. Large, luscious, exotic mangoes from tropical Florida, May through August, one-half lug (7-9 lbs.) $15.95, or full lug $22.50. Flavorful tropical jams: choose from orange, grapefruit, kumquat, tangerine, tangerine-lime, orange-coconut, orange-grapefruit, tropical mango, papaya, guava, or coconut toast spread. Three 2 1/2 oz. jars $8, six 2 1/2 oz. jars $11.50, three 8 oz. jars $10.50, six 8 oz. jars $16. Please add 10 percent for deliveries west of the Mississippi. Send inquiries, orders, and checks, payable to South Florida Vassar Club, to: Mrs. Richard P. Emerson, 1551 Salvatierra Dr., Coral Gables, FL 33134.

I am searching for women who were in the services during World War II for a survey on women’s use of education benefits of the G.I. Bill. Veterans interested in participating, please send name and address, and I will mail you a questionnaire. Beth Verdicchio, 5 Storybook La., St. James, NY 11780.

1982 Vassar graduate, currently a student at Albany Law School, is looking for a summer legal position in the Albany, New York City, or Long Island areas. Please send inquiries to: V. Richards, 100 Orchard St., Apt. 10B, Prospect Heights, Rensselaer, NY 12144.

Boston. Large, sunny, furnished, three-bedroom apartment to sublet and share from June through the summer. Available for one, two, or three people. Conveniently located near stores and public transportation. Rent reasonable. Contact: Shelley Meltzer (’80), 46 Parkvale Ave., #4, Allston, MA 02134, 617/783-4934.

In case anyone may know of a small cottage to rent an hour or so from Boston, within walking distance of a grocery and pharmacy, with the privilege to garden and country roads for walking, please inform C. Gordon Post, professor emeritus of political science at Vassar, and, after 14 years, about to become a professor emeritus of Wells College. P.O. Box 81, Aurora, NY 13026.


Couple (from the class of ’80) looking for caretaking job in greater New York area. Gardening/animal care/general maintenance in exchange for place to live. Contact: Marion Lipschutz/Terry Purinton, 212/460-5674.


Vassar on the Cape: Julie Conant Merchant ’46 cordially invites alumnae/i who are in residence year round, and those vacationing in the area, for cocktails, Wednesday, August 17, from 5 to 7 p.m. R.S.V.P.: Mrs. Roy Merchant, Jr., Box 653, West Falmouth, MA 02574; or phone 617/548-1850. Spouse or guest welcome. Alumnae/i attending the party will be given directions to Mrs. Merchant’s house in West Falmouth when they R.S.V.P.

Help! I am stuck in Philadelphia! An ’82 Vassar graduate is looking to house-sit anywhere in Europe this coming summer and fall. I am specifically interested in spending a lot of time in Italy. I would consider an au pair situation. Please write soon: Peter O’Connor, 1530 Locust St., Apt. 5-C, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

For rent: Portuguese Algarve, October through March, by week or month. Fully furnished, modern, three-bedroom, 3 1/2-bathroom house overlooking the sea. Short walk to town and beach. Fully equipped kitchen, electric heat, telephone, large terrace. Part-time maid. Lanny Atlas (Liane Wiener ’43), 2254 48th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007, 202/342-0919.


London. To let: charming small house in N.W. 1. Two bedrooms, all amenities, piano, and small garden, easy access to West End, $160 per week to include utilities. Write: Mrs. W. C. Bowman (’25), 51 Gloucester Crescent, London, N.W. 1, England.

London. Attractive furnished flats available in charming, convenient Hampstead area for sabbaticals, relocation, overseas work/study tours, etc. (minimum stay two months). Can place individuals or families. Orientation for schools and services willingly provided. Contact: Mrs. Henry Haberfeld (Judith Edwin ’56), 50 E. 72 St., New York, NY 10021, 201/569-5336 (evenings).

Scotland. For rent during July and August, my lovely old Highland house. Sleeps eight, domestic help available. Car is necessary. $150 per week plus electric heating and hot water (about $50 p.w.). Contact: Mrs. Winifred Comstock Bowman (’25), 51 Gloucester Crescent, London N.W. 1, England; Tel: 01, 485, 8342.

Paris. Large studio, two bedrooms, kitchen, bath, elevator, central heating; quiet, sunny, top floor. For rent during summer, fall. Length of time negotiable. Margaret Harmsworth Phillips (’51), 15 Square de Châllon, 75014 Paris. Telephone 542-57 03, or 86-75 91 71.

Vassar Wedgewood plates. Eight plates, each 10 1/2" in diameter, showing different campus buildings c. 1929. The set of eight: $200. Mrs. John Fitzpatrick, 47 Cumberland Ave., Plattsburgh, NY 12901, 518/561-4424.

Mount Holyoke College SummerMath. Two-week institutes for secondary school mathematics teachers. Choice of sessions: July 11-22 or July 25-August 5, 1983. Contact: SummerMath for Teachers, Dr. Joan F. Mundy, Director, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA 01075, 413/538-2608.
After she contracted cancer she continued her vigorous life, taking medical care wherever she happened to be.

In 1979 she was on her last research sabbatical in Paris and I joined her to continue work on my dissertation, the transcript of the Genesis portion of an early manuscript of Roger de Lisle's Histoire Ancienne. Between gruelling chemotherapy treatments at the Curie Institute, she and I set forth on a long awaited pilgrimage to Compostela, Spain. We traveled to Bayonne by train, in a six-person couchette with four rough men as fellow passengers. There we rented a car and Florence drove to Roncesvalles, where she quoted for me from Le Chanson de Roland. We followed the route of the twelfth-century pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. With great emotion we placed our fingers in the five holes worn in the central pillar of the western portico by weary pilgrims of nine centuries searching a blessing. Surely Florence found hers.

Her contribution to medieval scholarship is important and lasting, but her greatest gift to us is the gallant example she set as she continued to teach, study, travel, and publish year after year, undaunted by terminal cancer.

Mary Coker Joslin '44, Ph.D.
Professor of French and Humanities,
St. Augustin College,
Raleigh, North Carolina

Elsbeth McClure Clarke '44
A curable romantic
by Susanna Eszenyi Bedell '40

Hungarian-born Susanna Bedell holds an A.B. in botany from Vassar and a J.D. from Columbia University Law School. She is of counsel to Van De Water & Van De Water in Poughkeepsie. She is also a past vice-president of AAVC. "Stepping Out," her account of her claim against Corrall, appeared in last year's Quarterly feature about the Poughkeepsie-New York run.

Ever since 1940, I sent dear little notices to this magazine of my trappings and my infants, and read similar news of my fellow alumnae. (I had no fellow alumni.) Now I declare that at least one alumna is not all sugar and spice.

I used to be convinced, romantically, that there was only one person with whom one could be involved in a long-term relationship such as marriage. I married the perfect man. In fact, I married the man my mother would have selected for me had I permitted any parent of mine to do any selection on my behalf. However, I had rejected that venerable Hungarian custom.

Nineteen years later, the perfect man and I were divorced.

Does the perfect logic come to the rescue of the perfect woman (me) to explain what happened? Not at all. I am not about to offer dazzling insights into either a marriage or what I consider a happily divorced state. I am merely suggesting that the search for the "never-never land" of a perfect man and a perfect woman in a perfect marriage doing the perfect things, having the statistically perfect number of children in a perfect environment in the country is romantic fantasy. I do not know what the best alternative is, though I do know what it is not. It is not the romantic notion of unachievable objectives which require superhuman tolerance for one's own failings; "superhuman" because if you aim for artificial perfection you necessarily fail every single day in every way, and get neither strokes, nor self-respect, nor anything else which nourishes the soul.

In an interesting turnabout, thanks to the high divorce rate in this country, more and more literature seems to be devoting itself to the possibility of such a thing as a perfect divorce. A recent issue of Family Advocate, published by the American Bar Association for practitioners of family law, carried two articles — one pro, one con — on the use of a mediator in a divorce case. The idea prompting the articles, indeed, the law's whole approach of mediation, is to get clients out of a marriage with no trauma whatsoever, or with as little as humanly possible. One way to secure an amicable divorce, the suggestion goes, is to avoid the courts.

I do think that nothing much is accomplished in a court to cement a relationship that has broken by its own weight, but I also think that the question of an amicable divorce is another of the "bluebird of happiness" chasing which one cannot escape, even in one's professional life. It is part of a lawyer's job to realize that every break-up involves a measure of rejection. Every rejection is hard to bear, particularly one that is voluntarily dished out. In the case of divorce, rejection is the name of the game; you cannot make it an endearing and loving experience.

I even take issue with the romantic notions propagated by my fellow feminists about women. First, the most absurd part of that romanticism is to think of women as a group. We are not a great big sorority looking out for each other's interests. Most of us are rapacious females needing to mate when we are young, or needing to find at least compatible sexual, social, and economic arrangements in which to live out our fantasy of the dream that our mothers and fathers have programmed in us. As workers in the job market, we are also in a competitive situation, whether we are men or women, whether we live in a capitalist or any other kind of society. It is often said also that women do not want power, or, if they did acquire power, they would use it in some fashion that is different from how men would use it. Nobody who has power feels that way — and no fact is ever cited in support of that sort of wishful thinking.

Of course, I also quarrel with the antifeminists, like Phyllis Schlafly, and Anita Bryant, and the "Total Woman" snuggling into her Moral Majority costume to entice a virile man (always her legally wedded husband) to go to bed with her. This antifeminist romanticism is predicated on the idea that if all those awful feminists weren't around, all women's problems would just go away. If E.R.A. were not adopted as a constitutional amendment, the argument runs, husbands and wives would live together happily ever after. According to this notion, if we could just push Mother back into her electrified, air-conditioned, push-button, dishwasher-filled kitchen, and out of the job market, the contentment of life would increase to such a degree that I could devote my entire attention to writing articles about leases and not have to worry about divorce cases. That would be fine with me. I do not find domestic relations particularly exciting; intellectually, the field is less challenging than a sophisticated question on First Amendment rights. But "content" is not the way life is.

Notwithstanding the fact that I debunk romance, marriage, the family, and other sacred subjects, I view my own experience less as sour grapes than aged wine. I have found that whatever culture we need, we must carry with us, and that many of the limitations we perceive in our lives have resulted from our own ignorance. The important thing is to be doing something one feels makes a significant contribution to the world. It is my firm belief that women who do not have a meaningful occupation, whether inside or outside their homes, almost invariably turn to excesses and addictions. Desperation can start at any age. In fact, I think it is a lot harder to be young. One has much more pressure to become an adjunct to a husband or lover, or a chauffeur to one's children, and succumb to the myth of Colette Dowling's Cinderella Complex.

The media are full of enticements to far-off places of sun and sand, or pure, white, snow-filled slopes, with nary a slushy road in sight. But I invite you to come to the shadowy prospect of independence where I stand. You might enjoy the view as much as I do.
This summer, play it by ear

A vacation for those with music on their minds. AAVC’s “Beyond Music 140” takes you to grand country by day and grand opera by night. The week-long tour, August 14-20, features attendance at four performances (four different operas) of the Santa Fe Opera’s renowned summer festival, a concert of chamber music, and a performance of the Santa Fe Festival Theatre. Richard Wilson, professor of music at Vassar, will lecture daily, and excursions will include trips to Indian and Spanish villages. Cost per person is $1,325, excluding travel to Santa Fe. Write: “Beyond Music 140,” AAVC, Alumnae House, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601.

Also from AAVC: “Discovering the Italian Renaissance,” June 12-27. Benjamin Kohl, Vassar professor of history, will lead a trip that combines lectures, visits to historic sites, and events with local alumnae/i. Write: AAVC Tour, c/o Travel Dynamics, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104.