

Arts, Humanities, and the University—Selections from a Symposium

INTRODUCTION

THE ESSAYS AND EXCERPTS that follow come from two symposia which took place during the inaugural week of President James O. Freedman at The University of Iowa in October, 1982. Rather than trying to preserve the whole of those proceedings, we have extracted portions that might be of most interest to our readers, who are joined for the most part by the attention they pay contemporary literature. Those of us with that inclination can hardly ignore the influence of universities on writing today, their having become the most notable contemporary patron of the arts. And since Iowa has played a leading role in developing that patronage, we offer these writings in hopes of their being of more than local interest.

Many readers will not know, for example, that when The Writers' Workshop took firm shape in the early 1940s, it did not arise as a single program at Iowa but as one roughly parallel to studies developing similarly in music, drama, and the studio arts. Nor may they know of the climate of humanistic and critical inquiry that flourished here then.

Such history, of course, is at best a vantage for encountering the present. Accordingly, one essay here concerns the separation of professional training from core humanistic disciplines which had once been informed by moral philosophy. Though the particular example is medicine, the case is not all that distant from writing or the other arts in that the training offered in painting or poetry addresses primarily the competence, and only secondarily the character of the emerging artist. And finally the history of our universities has been to merge more and more with society. The very inclusion of the arts within university curricula is one sign of that happening; the last prose entry here forecasts our increasing interplay, as a university, with business.

Taken together, these pieces combine fragments of Iowa's history with a synoptic view of the business of universities today, with an eye focused on the often fruitful yet sometimes awkward home they provide the arts. In addition, we still commemorate another point of departure, one in which our university is fortunate.

The writers assembled in this collection are J. Richard Wilmeth,

Professor Emeritus of Sociology; Sherman Paul, Professor of English; the late Allan D. Vestal, Professor of Law; John Boyle, Professor of Religion; John F. Kennedy, Professor of Engineering and Director of the Institute of Hydraulic Research, and Marvin Bell Professor of English and of The Writers' Workshop.

CREATIVITY IN THE UNIVERSITY—THE IOWA EXPERIENCE

These inaugural festivities are taking place on the sixtieth anniversary of an important and widely influential new direction in the program of this university. I refer to a few simple words in the catalogue for 1922—"The thesis requirement may be interpreted broadly so as to include artistic production." The background for this innovative step may be found in the growing popularity of courses in creative writing offered by a number of enthusiastic teachers, but the use of the broader term "artistic production," was probably due to the influence of Carl Seashore, Professor of Psychology, who since 1908 had been dean of the Graduate College. Seashore had worked for many years in the psychology of music and had developed a widely used test of musical aptitude. From his position as graduate dean he was able to provide leadership and support for the recognition of creative work in writing, music, and theater. He participated in the appointment of P.G. Clapp to the music department and of E.C. Mabie to the department of speech and dramatic art. By 1922 both these men were already on the faculty and both remained active until the early 1950's. Clapp was composing steadily during these years as well as teaching, conducting, and carrying on administrative duties. Nearly a hundred Ph.D. degrees were awarded during this period, most of them in composition. During Mabie's years, 95 authors wrote 109 long plays and 62 short ones. While he regularly taught playwriting in addition to directing productions at the University Theatre, it was always under the title of Experimental Theatre.

Music and theatre by no means overshadowed writing and the visual arts. In 1929 President Jessup and Dean Seashore were leading figures in the establishment of a School of Fine Arts with Rufus Fitzgerald as director. Fitzgerald lacked credentials as artist or scholar but had gained a reputation at the university as a vigorous and able administrator. It is probable that the general design of an arts campus on the west bank of