

A Word in Conclusion

From the days of Hamlin Garland and Octave Thanet to those of Martin Yoseloff stretch more than fifty years of effort, by a score of competent writers, to record the life of Iowa towns and cities in fiction. Major aspects of our Iowa life — the relation between town and farm, between rich and poor, between tradition and innovation — have been explored sensitively and illuminated thoughtfully. The significant tensions resulting from economic changes have been faithfully reflected in the dramatic terms of family fortunes and personal problems. It is clear that this body of fiction has unique and lasting value as social history to the people of the state. In its variety, its concreteness, its insight, it can never be matched by formal chronicle or scholarly history. Without it our cultural heritage, our understanding of the present, and our appreciation of the past would be immeasurably impoverished.

It is our peculiar good fortune that some of those who have dealt with the Iowa scene in fiction have been able to see in the particularity of life in an Iowa town or city the universal in human experience, and to share that vision with appropriate grace and power. In these cases we have not only

social history but literature in the true sense, fiction that holds value for readers far beyond our bordering rivers and our moment in time.

I am grateful for the richness of our fiction, and for its not infrequent high achievement, as all readers of it must be. It has been a privilege to review it in this fashion. Yet as I complete the study I cannot but be aware of the great gaps in the record, the inviting and challenging themes as yet untouched, the areas of experience, of place and action, as yet unexplored. Perhaps most strikingly apparent is our lack of adequate fictional treatment of some of our cities that possess most dramatic physical settings and great richness of historical background: Dubuque, Council Bluffs, Clinton, Keokuk. And where is the worthy novel of the small town doctor, the small town lawyer, the small town editor? Clearly there is no danger that Iowa writers will run out of material — and, I humbly trust, no danger that Iowa will run out of writers.

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