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Facing Pages

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Facing Pages

IV

LAST SUMMER we got word from our central administration that if we wanted to secure our future, we had best look out for ourselves. The message was unexpected only in its timing and insistence. We scrambled as best we could, with results you may gather from our concluding pages.

For the moment, at least, we met the challenge we faced. By writing first to a group of alumni subscribers, then to all the writers whom we had published in the last ten years, and for whom we had addresses, then to all the faculty of The University of Iowa, and finally to some business leaders, principally in Iowa, we raised over \$19,500 in gifts, new subscriptions, and pledges, about two-thirds of that in gifts. Over 230 people responded, over a hundred of them faculty members, and that in a year when no one here got a raise. For all this timely help, we are most grateful, especially as each gift and each new subscription was also a vote for our survival and noticed as such by our administration. And so an audience of relatively few, compared to many that gather on this campus, has been decisive.

The most concrete results are, first, that our funding has now been guaranteed for another two years, and this in an era of unprecedented cutbacks in higher education, especially in the humanities and the arts. To be specific, to offset our projected annual deficit, our university has matched the money we have raised, and that on top of fractions of salaries for staff support, office space, and a few lesser expenses. Second, our name did not appear on a long list of university projects and programs slated for trimming, elimination, or “privatization.” Now we have time to look ahead and to plan for change with a slightly lessened sense of emergency.

On the whole it seems to me that our heretofore unwritten motto of very long standing—“Local but not Provincial”—is being affirmed. Our sources of support have been widespread, from local people to be sure, and from many members of our own English department, but also from readers and writers from all over the country, and from colleagues on campus whose work and careers are so different from our own that we seldom if ever cross their paths. We can only assume that our record to date has been persuasive and that these people felt The University of Iowa should,

through this magazine, continue to do what it has long been trying to do, which is to play a small but significant role in the ongoing publication of our national literature, without particular deference to more powerful voices elsewhere, and with special attention, in every issue, to locating and supporting some emerging literary talent. In so doing, we have always provided a mix of the local with the far-flung—as in the Forum on *The Book of J* before you in this issue.

Perhaps many of you will wonder whether we will now favor writers who have become our Friends. Surely we will make every effort to keep the two roles separate, and we assume the writers who have contributed money would not want it otherwise. Graduate students who read and discuss manuscripts with me are a safeguard. They are largely ignorant of the roll of donors and not much persuaded by such connections. They keep urging work upon me that they believe has literary merit and so reinforce the principal questions: How do we offer fair readings to and make choices from among the 300–500 unsolicited stories and poems that come to us weekly? Is this one a good story? Why? Is this a good poem?

A recent op-ed piece in our campus newspaper observed that we have become a “supply-side” university. Witness, it said, the placement of construction cranes. Over the last decade, we’ve built a basketball arena, an indoor practice field for football, a law building, a communications studies building, and have added on and on to the hospital. A new building for the business school is under construction; so is a laser center. Each of these buildings is for activity that tends to attract money more than disperse it. Most have noticeable connections to the commercial world. The writer of that piece, Thomas Walz, Professor of Social Work, went on to suggest that such an imbalance of investment—as we write the roof of our library leaks; its north door is permanently closed, and on Friday and Saturday nights the building closes at ten, forcing bookworms and browsers to make their way elsewhere—in no way contradicts our stated ambition of becoming a “top ten” public university. It only helps us see how such a rating is currently defined. If we have escaped being assimilated to such a view, it is, again, the “votes” of a good many that have made the difference.

We in turn wish to offer the continuing difference of good reading and of alert editorial attention. If you think our last covers have been hand-

some, sometimes stunning, well, we have the next six chosen and can hardly wait. We have, I think some stunning contents as well. We have interviews with Marilynne Robinson and Carol Bly coming, one also with a nun whose long life of service has been mostly in Malaysia and China. We have an essay on Elizabeth Bishop, another on fishing in literature, or, rather, on not caring about literature with any sign of fishing in it. We have poems from writers we welcome back to our pages—Dionisio D. Martínez, Don Colburn, Marianne Boruch. Other stories and poems are by persons we didn't know at all but who, we hope, will seize you just as they have commanded our attention. We have two, small, previously unpublished essays by Virginia Woolf. And we will have reviews. We hope you will stay with us. If you possibly can, we hope you will join the list of subscribers who offer more than the minimum support and place yourself somewhere on our continuum of Angels to Friends.

D.H.