

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). 238 pp. \$29.95.

The title of Bill Readings' book is a summary of his thesis. There is a sadness in it as the author discusses the current state of the university, where it is, and how it got that way. For example, he says, "I want to perform a structural diagnosis of contemporary shifts in the University's functions as an institution, in order to argue that the wider social role of the University as an institution is now up for grabs. It is no longer clear what the place of the University is within society, nor what the exact nature of that society is, and the changing institutional form of the University is something that intellectuals cannot afford to ignore" (p. 2). Moreover, "...the centrality of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the life of the University is no longer assured."

A further lament is that the university has now become an economic animal. In many cases, he points out, we find a strictly economic description of the functioning of the university in terms of cost and benefits. This emerging business model is a damaging one, and the corresponding move to performance indicators concerns him also. More money is given to high scoring departments while poorer ones, rather than being developed, are starved for cash. He questions whether this is the best way to proceed. Although he is pleased that the three primary functions of the university—research, teaching, and administration—continue, what concerns him is that the last of these, administration, is the most rapidly expanding field in terms of allocation of resources. Indeed, he argues that the general principle of administration replaces the functions of teaching and research, so that teaching and research are actually subsumed under administration. His definition of administration is the "stratum of bureaucrats who administer the whole," and it is clear that he does not have deep respect for the people who do that. (Readers of this journal, beware!)

He expands his theme by noting that the university is becoming like a transnational corporation and that that is one of the major reasons why the university is now a ruined institution. The cause of this shift, he believes, has been the decline of the nation-state and of the culture of national ideology that has shifted the traditional role of the university into the economic and technical institution which he bemoans.

The book contains a rich and detailed discussion of the roots of the modern university, and it provides an excellent summary of prominent European thinkers. Readings suggests that we reread the Germans: Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte, and Kant. He praises Oxford as the model of Cardinal Newman's idea of the university and points out how Newman's philosophy differed from that of the Germans. He reminds us that Newman explicitly positions literature as the site of development of both an idea of a nation and the study of literature as the means of training national subjects. He clearly likes the Newman model.

He is particularly hard on American universities and asserts that in the United States, the idea of literary culture has been historically structured by the notion of the canon (fights about which he deplors) rather than tradition. He devotes an entire chapter to cultural wars and cultural studies. Moreover, he discusses what happened in 1968 and how the uprisings in Europe and the United States contributed to the ruin of the university and the crisis that we are now experiencing.

This book will be enjoyed by those who are students of the history of higher education, particularly its various philosophical bases. It will be seen as less useful by the more practical-minded administrators (many of whom read this journal). The author has serious concerns about the rise of the administrative class, and, although he does not blame those who administer, he clearly wishes they did not have such a prominent role in the university of today. His thesis that the university is in ruins is not a new one. But the presentation here is an interesting and well thought-out one. There is both lament and anger in the book, and this reader would have liked to see more in the way of suggestions about what can be done about the situation.

The author died in a plane crash as he was making the final revisions to the volume, and his colleague Diane Elam completed those revisions so that it could go to print. We must thank her for completing that task and for bringing us this thoughtful and scholarly work.

—Sherry H. Penney

Joseph N. Crowley. *No Equal in the World: An Interpretation of the Academic Presidency* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1994). 300 pp. \$29.95.

Charles Eliot, "the greatest of the great presidents (Harvard, 1869-1909) of the Golden Age," characterized the academic presidency as a profession that "has no equal in the world." Joseph Crowley, who had been president of the University of Nevada, Reno, for sixteen years when this volume was first published (twenty-one years at this date), and a political scientist, offers a historical overview of the academic presidency in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that is supported by the histories, biographies, analyses, and novels that deal with a job that fascinates him. He has a compelling approach and an unsurprising point of view as to whether or not Eliot would feel the same today.

The pre-Civil War period was hazardous to presidents, given that 412 of 516 colleges (81%) in sixteen states did not survive. An intriguing observation by the author is that "Clearly, the president's job was different then. The focus was on students." This era was led by both traditionalists and reformers. There were heroes. Eliphalet Nott, president of Union College from 1804 to 1866, transformed that institution in his sixty-two year term. Mark Hopkins of Williams College and Henry Tappan of the University of Michigan, among others, left their marks, although the latter was dismissed after eleven years for an "unwarranted assumption of dignity and importance."

The postwar period from 1870 to 1900, the first Golden Age of American higher education, was a time of Titan presidents who literally created their worlds. They included Eliot, who believed that the university must be a community rather than a group of autonomous units, White at Cornell, Angell at Michigan, Gilman at Johns Hopkins, Jordan at Stanford, and Harper at Chicago, each of whom represented "a

great office in perhaps its greatest age.” These men were not without the challenges of financial backing, dependence on a single donor, trustee power, academic freedom, and a critical press—which led to the development of the first public relations office. Crowley includes such black presidents as Booker T. Washington, and such female presidents as Ada L. Howard of Wellesley, the first female to head an American college, as well as Alice Freeman Palmer of the same institution. Titans they may have been, but many of them were not the first choice of selection committees at the time. The literature is deeper and more useful about this group than about any other.

The presidency changed in the years from 1900 to 1945 as institutions became larger, more complex, and bureaucratized, and as such new forces as the American Association of University Professors appeared in 1915. Presidents’ approaches to their tasks continued to vary. Benjamin Ide Wheeler of the University of California succeeded as an authoritarian, but Charles Van Hise moved the University of Wisconsin to a premier land-grant status by consultation and participation, while identifying the university with the welfare of its state. Lowell of Harvard, Wilson of Princeton, and Butler and Eisenhower of Columbia presented markedly different approaches to their jobs in a period when presidential biography and studies declined.

Crowley labels the postwar years, “Great Men to Mediators,” as a second Golden Age that began with Sputnik in 1957, and as campus protests erupted a decade later. As the author puts it, “there developed a preoccupation not with individuals but with variables, circumstances, psychological factors, and social and structural forces.” His presentation is divided into summaries of the writings of analysts and critics (a helpful breakdown of mostly unhelpful “scholarship”) and the perspective from the office of the president. These chapters are organized by presidential models, types, and issues in a period that produced a much inflated bibliography.

A chapter on the president in fiction, mostly written by faculty members, does not uncover great literature, but it does reveal a discomfort with authority on campus and a yearning for anarchy. Novels reflect the times as well as personal challenges when, in one instance, a president asks himself how “a man gets into the position of doing petty and grievous things to his friends?” The answer is, “Because the world turns a man into a president.” During the Vietnam years there were a host of presidential casualties, while many presidents complained of increasing responsibilities but decreasing power and security, even though critics failed to see it that way. The modern era has not lent itself as yet to helpful categorization as the previous ones have, but there are individuals who will stand out in the presidential mosaic when the account of the last fifty years is written.

Clearly the profession of academic president in today’s world, given the huge variety of circumstances, is a challenging art form individualized by person, place, and conditions. Talent, timing, fortune, and luck all play roles in an incumbent’s success, just as it appears they always did. Such issues as the president’s role as academic or educational leader, and whether or not to view his or her enterprise as a collegium or a bureaucracy, are clearly timeless. Obviously, as an academic president, how one feels about one’s job may depend on whether or not it lasts two years or twenty years.

While Joseph Crowley has not written the definitive history of the academic presidency, and does not claim to, whoever does will need his analysis, organization, and judgment to bring it off. As to what Eliot would think today, the author concludes that “He could find convincing reasons to avow again that the presidency—despite everything and whatever one’s choice of metaphor—is still unique, still a job that demands a leader, still an office that makes a difference, still a profession that has no equal in the world,” and he could comment extensively on why this is so. This book is for scholars, presidential search committees, members of the faculty senate, trustees, and presidents or wannabes.

—John H. Keiser