

## PAUL ENGLE

Paul Engle was one of Iowa's greatest citizens. Born October 12, 1908, this son of a horse-trader from Cedar Rapids attended the University of Iowa, earning a graduate degree in English. His master's thesis, the volume of poems *Worn Earth* (1932), won the Yale Series of Younger Poets, and set him on a lifelong, world-wide journey: first to Columbia University, then to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, and later to Moscow in 1936 for his honeymoon. Although he settled permanently in Iowa City in 1937, his trips abroad—and his internationally-oriented thinking—continued until his untimely death in 1991.

In early 1941, he began his three-decade tenure as Director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, during which time he recruited nationally known writers as faculty, increased enrollment, raised millions of dollars in support, and established the Workshop as the most significant creative writing program in the country—a status it retains today.

All during that time, Engle was acting locally, but thinking globally, looking abroad for potential students and seeing American literature in the context of the world's literatures. A trip to Taiwan in the early 1960's introduced him to a Chinese writer, Hualing Nieh, whom he would invite to the Writers' Workshop. They would later marry, and when Engle stepped down as Workshop director, he and Hualing inaugurated another writing program at the University of Iowa: the International Writing Program.

In an appreciation for the *Des Moines Register*, Paul Engle's many hats were listed: “a teacher, organizer, money-raiser, sage, editor, crusader, spotter of talent, developer of genius, prairie philosopher and the man who inspired thousands of writers as director of the University of Iowa's famed Writers' Workshop.” After 1969, he turned those talents to building the International Writing Program into a place where the world's writers could come, write freely, and inspire one another. Writers visiting at the IWP often took home teaching and administrative models which Engle had brought to such fruition in Iowa City. Gradually, on the grounding of the Workshop and through the exchanges of the IWP, the state of Iowa became synonymous with literary excellence around the world. Not only did the “Iowa method” of teaching creative writing proliferate across the US, it has become increasingly ubiquitous internationally.

In his lifetime, Paul Engle published more than a dozen books of poetry, a novel, a children's book, and a full-length opera libretto. He won awards for his poetry, edited a book series, and was a featured voice in many national magazines. It is no exaggeration to suggest that, behind the scenes, Engle had an impact on modern letters—how it was written, and how and where it was read—to rival the effect of any literary figure of the twentieth century.