

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

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P.P.
CREATIVE WR.

FROM: GF

DATE: September 10, 1964

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COMMENTS:

SUBJECT: Discussion at Robert Lowell Luncheon

We discussed in detail the scope, organization and procedure for an individual grant program serving creative writers including poets, novelists, playwrights and possibly critics and essayists. The inclusion of playwrights is tentative depending upon discussions Robert Lowell might have with Alan Schneider and RF officers.

Mr. Lowell is quite definite in his own mind that an RF program of this kind should be unique in selecting only individuals of the highest distinction and potential. This does not eliminate risk-taking, especially when it comes to younger writers; but it should be different from Guggenheim and other programs, which because of their application and selection procedure tend too often to get run-of-the-mill candidates and low common denominator grantees.

There are good reasons for not publicly inviting writers to apply. The onrush of applications and manuscripts would not only be burdensome but because of the sheer volume would be an impediment to good selection procedures. Instead, Mr. Lowell would work with a number of carefully selected nominators who would be invited by letter to submit on a confidential basis the names of individual writers and their qualifications for consideration in the competition. It would be explained that writers in three categories of age and experience would be considered: 1) established senior writers who are in need; 2) writers of some demonstrated accomplishments who appear on the way up, typically in the 25 to 33 year old bracket; 3) very young writers probably mostly still students who may have published only in college vehicles but who are believed to have outstanding potential. These writers may be poets, novelists, playwrights, etc. The list of nominators would be flexible, including university personnel and professional writers in various areas of the United States. From time to time one may want to add names to the list which at the start probably should not exceed ten to fifteen.

Continued -

From among those nominated Mr. Lowell, utilizing such additional advice as he may solicit, will select some as potential candidates with whom we would correspond, inviting them to apply probably utilizing an application form and possibly inviting them to submit samples of their writing in addition to full lists of published work. Those who apply would then be reduced to a short list to be acted upon by a committee of three with Mr. Lowell as chairman. At present Mr. Lowell is inclined to invite Saul Bellow also to serve, and the third person might be a playwright. This small committee might have a preliminary meeting to discuss criteria of selection and would then reconvene to make selections. With a minimum number of awards to poets, playwrights, etc., each might be decided upon and each member of the committee might be given three or five clear choices with the rest of the awards decided by unanimous or two to one votes as the case may be.

Mr. Lowell conceives of 25 awards in the first year assuming playwrights would be included. While support would be primarily to replace living cost needs for a full year, it is understood that in some instances there should be flexibility to permit spreading assistance over several years and also providing travel costs. The level of stipends should also be flexible. For example, a young, unmarried writer might make do with \$4,000, a more senior writer might require \$12,000 or conceivably even \$15,000. The average award might be approximately \$7,000. Thus we might ask for an initial appropriation of \$200,000.

While it would be understood where readily feasible awards might be made via universities and colleges provided, however, that the institutions would make minimum demands of the writers, Mr. Lowell hopes that there would be sufficient flexibility to permit direct fellowship-style awards to appropriate individuals.

It was agreed that when and where feasible, applicants, particularly those on the short list, should be interviewed by Mr. Lowell, another member of his committee, or an RF officer; but this is not to be absolutely essential.

There is no reason why we could not at an early time, perhaps October or December, go to the Trustees with a document describing the purposes of the program to elicit funds which would be granted at a meeting of Mr. Lowell's committee either in the spring or early autumn of 1965.



G. F.