

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

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CREATIVE WRITING

FROM: RXC

DATE: Sept 16, 1964

TO:

KWT		
GF		
AS		
RL		

COMMENTS:

cc to each

SUBJECT: Creative Writing Program

I concur essentially with the first three paragraphs of GF's memo of September 15 on a Creative Writing Program. Beginning with paragraph four, however, I have some different thoughts. I think it would be a mistake to create a selection committee for this program. I believe that among the excellent aspects of our present scholarship/fellowship program is the real flexibility that exists in terms of timing as well as the serious responsibility placed upon officers to make final decisions in regard to the selection of recipients.

In most cases, individuals considered for fellowships are brought to our attention by "nominators" in the person of university administration and/or faculty members. On a preliminary basis we thus are relying on them for the identification of "talent." In addition, there also are the limited number of candidates who come to our attention in other ways - but the ultimate responsibility for selection rests with the officers and we virtually always interview the candidate at least once, and many times more often, in his home-country and home-institution environment. I see no reason why this well-tested and proved system cannot also work in the field of creative writing. As we have done abroad, we can build up here a group of people who might serve us in the capacity of nominators in the sense that we would, as GF suggests, then contact such people individually (both in person and if we already know them in person, by letter if a personal visit is impossible at a given time), inform them of this program of individual awards and encourage them to bring to our attention those people of talent whose work they know. We would then go through a rigorous process of checking on those suggested, by contacting others who should know about them and their work and by checking on those who might be listed as references for them. We should, in this way, receive a good balanced series of comments in regard to the "talent" and professional qualifications of the potential candidate.

I then think that it is most important that we as officers assume the responsibility of personal interviews - not just here in the office, but "in the field" in the same way we find out about a candidate for our regular fellowship program. We would then be in a position to reach our

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final conclusions based on the professional advice we have received from those most involved in the candidate's creative field and balanced by our own methods of selection. In this way, the program can be continuing one with no time limits for submission of applications and without entering into a competition-type situation which results if a committee meets at some time or times to consider a number of applications larger than the number of awards it is possible to make. I feel strongly that in fields of artistic creativity competition should not be a virtually explicit element in the final selection process. It is, of course, always there to a degree when one makes decisions based on the ultimate fiscal limits of a program, but it takes quite a different point of emphasis in the process when final determination of awards is made at one time. I recommend very strongly, therefore, that we do not create a selection committee.

I agree with GF on two of his three categories of groups to be considered for assistance. I would knock out his number 3 category "younger writers probably mostly still students or of college age who may not have a significant record of publications but who are believed to have outstanding potential." I would suggest that the emphasis be directed towards GF's category number 2, although I would not include any age bracketing in it. I would guess that we would find writers "of some demonstrated accomplishments who appear on the way up" not only in the 25-35 year old age group, but also among older and younger groups. There may be a tendency to find them in this group, but there are I am sure many early starters and late starters who should not be excluded.

By removing the third category of potential candidates, and by assuming more active responsibility for the implementation of this program by officers, I believe that the total number of awards to be made during the course of the first year of the program might well be below the suggested figure of 20 to 25 - perhaps we should think in terms of 15 with a not rigidly defined, but nevertheless suggested figure of 5 for the novel, 5 for poetry, and 5 for playwriting. Accepting GF's average of \$8,000 per grant, this would amount to a request to the Trustees for an appropriation of \$120,000 - let's say \$125,000. If it turns out that we are successful in identifying more than this number of first rate people during the course of this first year, we could, I imagine present a strong case for additional funds, if necessary and justified, based on the unexpected "success" of the program.

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