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401R  
 Univ. of Birmingham  
 literary awards

April 25, 1945

Dear Eliot:

I am sure you will recall our conversation in which we talked about the work of younger British writers, particularly those who are now in some kind of wartime service. As I think I told you, I likewise talked on this subject with such others as Herbert Read, F. R. Leavis, and finally in Edinburgh after I had seen you, with Edmund Muir. On the long trip back, I settled down to read as much as I could of the work of these writers which is now being published. I had from Read, for example, the proofs of R. N. Currey's forthcoming book of verse, and some recent numbers of New Writing. As the perspective lengthened, I found myself feeling more and more that there was something rather extraordinary in much of this work: however disintegrating the war may have been for some, it seems to have had a re-integrating force in really perceptive minds. And that is the impression which I find shared here by others who have seen the material I brought back - Dick Blackmur, for example.

I suppose it is only natural that the essentially human experience of the war should find its first formulation in literature. If that is, indeed, the case - and I think from what you said you had something of the same feeling - perhaps there is something here which any agency with an interest in the humanities like that which prevails in the Foundation ought to consider. Certainly it would seem that unless these younger writers have an opportunity to write as they may wish to on release from wartime service, much of value may go unwritten.

At any rate, that being the feeling among us here in the Foundation, we are prepared to see what might be done. On one point we are reasonably clear: that if anything of this kind were done, it should be entirely in British hands, the Foundation's only part being to provide the needed funds.

If you feel that something of the kind would be appropriate and desirable, would you care to give us the benefit of your advice as to what agency in Great Britain might be interested and competent to take responsibility. Ordinarily, of course, the Foundation only makes grants to well established institutions with administrative facilities that give every assurance of a proper use of funds granted. I confess from my limited knowledge of such institutions in Great Britain, I cannot think of one which is so constituted as to make me certain that it could be expected to provide

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the kind of administration which would be required in this case. And since, as you know, all this was merely in the idea stage when I talked with you, I did not feel free to make inquiries while I was in Great Britain.

We are by no means clear as to precisely what form such fellowships should take. Presumably they might be considered for British subjects, no matter what their origin within the Commonwealth, who have undergone wartime service in the armed forces or in some civilian capacity. To meet present conditions, we have found over here that it is useful to make appointments, as we have been doing in non-literary fields, for a period not to exceed twelve months, but specified only by saying that whatever period is chosen for the appointment, it must begin before a terminal date, such as December 31, 1948. Thus a man granted an appointment now, while still in wartime service, can look forward to as much as twelve months in which he would be free to write as he pleased. That, of course, as I see it, would be the principal purpose: to buy time for younger writers to enable them to write as they saw fit while the force of their wartime experience was still strong.

For the present, I am writing of this possibility only to you and think you will agree that it should be regarded as something pretty much between ourselves - in so far as that is possible at this time. It is, indeed, for that reason that I am asking the Office of War Information to transmit this letter to you so that its contents will not be known, except to a very limited group, who will, I am sure, be bound to regard it as strictly confidential.

But if the possibility is one that seems to you appropriate and potentially productive, and if you can suggest some way in which it might be entirely British in administration, I should be only too glad to go on to whatever next steps might be indicated to give it realization.

Yours sincerely,

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JM:EHD

