To Our Readers

IN the opening pages of this number we are presenting material that is both more topical and more polemic than that traditionally published in *The Georgia Review*. The initial essay in this forum, by the novelist Hilary Masters, offers a critique of the National Endowment for the Arts' 1979–80 Fellowships for Creative Writers; it is followed by a response from David Wilk, Director of the NEA Literature Program. Why we are making this exception to our usual editorial practice calls for an explanation, we believe, especially since it involves publishing a critique of a program helping writers at a time when public aid to the arts (never really substantial) is under serious threat of curtailment.

No one should expect unanimous approval of any list of writers receiving awards, but the announcement of the NEA's 1979–80 Fellowships for Creative Writers drew far more than the usual amount of criticism and is still—many months later—being attacked. In the April/May 1981 issue of *Coda: Poets and Writers Newsletter*, for instance, a number of poets specifically cited those grants as an indication of a larger problem. "All seemed to agree with [David] Ignatow that although it was only 'a one-shot mafia' it wasn't fair for at least 18 of 275 $10,000 grants to have gone to the St. Marks–Naropa–Bolinas group," reports Debby Mayer. Carolyn Kizer (a former Director of the NEA Literature Program) called it "a public scandal." William Matthews speculated that perhaps "the panel hypnotized itself, or was hypnotized by a strong member. . . ." Michael Anania labeled it "shocking."

Among those early to question the apparent patterns of relationships between grants panelists and fellowship recipients was Hilary Masters, who was subsequently commissioned by *New York Magazine* (in December 1979) to write on the subject. The essay that resulted—initially received with enthusiasm—was eventually declined as "too literary," following a change in editors at that magazine. Since then it has had an interesting and lengthy history of near-acceptances, one enthusiastic acceptance followed later with an apologetic retraction, and returns from

journals (some of them openly apprehensive about the consequences of publishing it). Meanwhile it has been enjoying an active underground circulation in Xerox copies—most of them unauthorized—and was in at least one case actually quoted in print and given footnote citation.

As is the case with any material published in *The Georgia Review*, the opinions expressed by Hilary Masters should not be viewed as necessarily reflecting those of the editors, the editorial board, or the University of Georgia. Our decision to provide a forum for these views was made in part because it seems clear that the larger issues addressed by Masters are not effectively confronted merely by dismissing the 1979–80 grant process as a one-time aberration. Furthermore, the uncontrolled nature of its current underground circulation—never intended by the author—offers almost no possibility of its being corrected when in error and little likelihood of its influencing the reforms it calls for.* The position presented by Masters, in our opinion, merits open and serious consideration, and this is why we are publishing his critique in full. The detailed response by David Wilk, graciously provided on very short notice, allows the Masters essay to be read within a larger context, corrects some inaccuracies, and specifies some of the reforms already initiated in the fellowship program since the 1979–80 round of grants. Both will contribute, we hope, to a further open discussion of the issues and ultimately to a strengthening of the NEA's Literature Program.

These are hardly promising times for writers. *The* [London] *Times Literary Supplement* of 10 April 1981 reports that the Arts Council there has decided to abandon its "Grants to Writers" program. (The British grants, first made in 1964, had come under attack for failing to represent a cross section of the populace, for nepotism, and for cliquishness.) On this side of the Atlantic, President Reagan's proposals to reduce drastically the financial support for both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities seem all too likely to be enacted by Congress. We strongly oppose these cuts and hope that the Congress will realize the long-range cultural damage such misguided action would entail. Both of the Endowments have already made many valuable contributions and have immense potential for further enrichment of the culture.

Our general support of the National Endowments should not, however, prevent our publishing material that questions the manner in which

* The draft version of Masters' critique being circulated underground is, in fact, substantially different from the essay as printed in the following pages.

some of their programs have been implemented. Self-censorship seems unlikely to aid the cause of the arts in any case; if reform is needed, and can be effected, the National Endowment for the Arts should be better able to withstand less friendly criticism in the future. Although the analogy is less than perfect, perhaps it is worth recalling—from Jewish gallows humor—the story of two men being marched to a firing squad. When the first indicated that he planned to demand his right to smoke one final cigarette, the second argued, "Oh no! That might make them really angry!" Certainly it will be a bleak time indeed if American writers join those who, when asked if they have any final words, reply: "Not at this time."

Our final position is one in agreement with a recent statement by U. S. Senator William Proxmire:

> How can we reconcile the possibility that criticism may suppress and crush the truth seekers of this world with the need to explore and reduce a waste of federal resources that goes against the public weal?
>
> The answer is discussion and debate—open, free, and as vigorous as possible.

—*S. W. L.*

Hilary Masters

Go Down Dignified: The NEA Writing Fellowships

Better to go down dignified
With boughten friendship at your side
Than none at all. Provide, provide!
—Robert Frost

AS these words are read, the works of several thousand American writers are being reviewed by panels recommended by Mr. David Wilk, Literature Program Director for the National Endowment for the Arts, and late this summer a few hundred of these writers will be awarded fellowships of $12,500 each. The prize is more than money, for with it comes an imprimatur that certifies on curricula vitae, book flaps, and letters home that the recipients are (to use the NEA's own language) "published writers of exceptional talent"—America's Best, officially recognized by a bureau of culture created by the United States Congress and funded by the U. S. Taxpayer.

When created as part of the National Endowment for the Arts, the writing fellowships were enthusiastically hailed. At last, it could be said, America was doing something for its poets and fiction writers and playwrights. And it has. Many a good writer has been aided. Many promising writers have been given financial support and encouragement who might have been "overlooked" because of sex, race, or ethnic origins by the traditional private philanthropic institutions. So it would be a tragic slip of the knife if the Reagan administration reduces the NEA's budget by the 50% it has asked for; not only would the Literature Program be crippled, but also the symphony orchestras, ballet companies, theatre groups, and other art programs supported by the agency. But the attention of the budget-cutters would be likely drawn to a government department that

seems to satisfy few and has received substantial criticism, such as that published in a recent editorial of *The Washington Post*:

> The charge that a "closed circle" of acquaintanceship runs the Endowment through overlapping appointments to panels and committees is a serious one, and one both the Arts and Humanities Endowments have been guilty of for a long time. Besides the obvious wrong of creating situations where *friends make grants to friends, or friends of friends* [italics mine], there is also the patently unhealthy set-up in which stale ideas recycle like so much dead air. . . .

It's an old truism that the recipient makes the prize—whether it be the Shekomeko Arts Festival Award or the Nobel Prize—and this is also the case with the NEA's literary fellowships. Names appear on last year's list of fellowships that few would question: Arturo Vivante or Raymond Carver or Gibbons Ruark or such younger writers as Lee Zacharias and Maxine Hong Kingston—to name only a handful. But the value of the award is unquestionably diminished when writers of this quality share the same honors with such "winners"—and again, to name only a very few—as the author of "Clean Asshole Poems" or the writer of waiting-room epics with titles like "Aloha to Love."

Or take the case of the 1979–80 writing fellowship granted to a Midwestern writer[1]—one whose name was unknown to the staff of a prestigious quarterly published in that region. Thinking that here was a talented local writer whose work had been overlooked by them, the editors called the successful award-winner. They were disconcerted to learn from the grantee that he had had no intention of applying for a fellowship until a long-distance phone call came from a friend who had just been appointed to one of the NEA Literature Panels. He should apply immediately, the friend said. He did—and ended up with $10,000 (the value of the 1980 prize).

How such a case history squares with Mr. Wilk's declaration that the "Panel makes their [*sic*] own decisions on quality, as has always been the case"[2] requires a reasoning perhaps too subtle for the ordinary mind.

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[1] Most of the grants went to New York and California; few found their way to Middle America or the South. States like Oklahoma, Michigan, Georgia, and Indiana received only two each. Louisiana, Kansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi got only one apiece. Both West Virginia and Utah also received only one fellowship each, and theirs were given to writers with no permanent residence in those states. Missouri received none.

[2] Quoted from a letter (to an unnamed small press editor) by Eric Baizer in *The Literary Monitor*, Vol. 3 (1980), Nos. 3 & 4, p. 32.

Indeed, there's much evidence to suggest that merit is too seldom the prime consideration and that cronyism is commonplace. Some of the judges appear to have been singularly successful in directing hundreds of thousands of dollars in fellowships to the same writers they have edited or "published" (usually in magazines of infrequent appearance or in chapbooks of only 300-copy editions).

For example, how did a small press—once located in California but out of business by the time of the 1979–80 awards—come up with seven of its authors winning fellowships out of a total of 274? That's more than any other publisher—small or large, in business or not—could claim. What would be the odds on those seven[3]—all associated with Big Sky Press of Kensington, California—being rescued from the pile of 3,750 writers who had applied for fellowships that year?

"I wouldn't bet on it," Ron Padgett replied.[4] Mr. Padgett was a member of the Advisory Panel who made those final selections, and as the publisher of the Full Court Press (now also out of business, according to him) he happened to have published two of the same authors and distributed the work of a third. Mr. Padgett was one of several appointed to serve only one year on the Advisory Panel, "to help make the awards," reported a staff member of the Literature Program.[5]

Mr. Bill Berkson, the former editor and publisher of the defunct Big Sky, did not seem surprised when asked about the great number of his authors who found their way into the winners' circle. During the course of a phone conversation,[6] he was able to find yet more fellowship winners who had published with him, either through the press or in the magazine of the same name (also now out of business). No stranger to the structure of grant committees, he served on the 1975 grants panel of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM), an organization that distributes NEA funds to magazines. Mr. Berkson says he never encountered any evidence of cronyism.

"I can't say it never occurs," he said. "But I haven't run across it. All the marks were of high quality of this or that press." However, he suggested that sexual, racial, or regional considerations "sometimes cloud the literary questions—to please every constituency." The term *con-*

[3] Big Sky's winners were Barrett Watten, Richard Gallup, Bernadette Mayer, Larry Fagin, Ted Greenwald, Alice Notles, and Tom Veitch.

[4] Phone conversation, 7 February 1980.

[5] Phone conversation with R. Huggins, NEA staff member of Literature Program, 19 December 1979.

[6] Phone conversation with Bill Berkson, 26 December 1979.

stituency came up several times in the course of different interviews and seems to reflect a political orientation that influences the Literature Program's policy. It is a term also employed by David Wilk, who has been quoted by Joel Deutsch as saying, "Besides, when you award 200 Fellowships, you create a constituency of 3800 enemies"[7]—unconsciously putting an adversarial interpretation upon the relationship between the NEA and those it was created to serve.

Mr. Berkson's Big Sky Press formerly operated from the same address in Kensington, California, as the Serendipity Book Distribution Company (or SBD),[8] which is no stranger to winning tax monies either. In 1976, SBD was awarded a grant of $20,000; on its board of directors about then was a Jack Shoemaker, who also served on the Literature Panel from August of 1973 to July of 1977. Mr. Shoemaker's own Sand Dollar Press was awarded $6,000 of NEA monies in 1975. This is old history, of course, and perhaps only coincidental. It becomes relevant in retrospect as part of what is evidently not so much a pattern as a tradition of NEA allocations to a single address.

One of the seven Big Sky writers who won a 1979–80 fellowship is Barrett Watten who also happens to be an editor and publisher of This Press (a firm that was at that time located, curiously enough, at the same address in Kensington, California). Mr. Watten's authors did pretty well too, with four of them picking up $10,000 each—that's four out of 3,750 supposedly selected on the quality of writing alone! Of course, one of these four was Mr. Watten who—doubtless on the basis of merit—publishes himself. In all fairness, then, perhaps his name should be subtracted from the Big Sky seven. But with even more justification it could be argued that the two lists should be combined: sharing the same lucky address, Big Sky/This Press came up with a total of $100,000 in prize monies for its authors in 1979–80. Move over, Doubleday.

Mr. Berkson, when questioned, was willing to admit all this sounded like "an in-group thing, but it's not sneaky or a matter of nepotism because I wouldn't have published in that magazine [*This Press*] if I didn't respect it." This unexpected disclosure illustrates an all too typical arrangement in the world of small presses: Mr. Berkson publishes Mr. Watten, Mr. Watten publishes Mr. Berkson. Their symbiotic relationship

[7] "A Constituency of Enemies," *The Literary Monitor*, Vol. 3 (1980), Nos. 3 & 4, p. 48.

[8] These two operations, plus This Press, all shared the same address and were so listed in such authoritative directories as *Books in Print* and the Dustbooks *International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Since 1979, Big Sky has gone out of business and the other two have taken different addresses.

may represent the sort of thing that Felix Stefanile was talking about when he said that the National Endowment has started "a new little magazine movement, made up of magazines that live on federal grants, and would die without them, while the majority of small press publishers refuse to play this shoddy game of grantsmanship."

The connections that This Press and Big Sky have with members of the two panels who chose the literary fellowships for 1979–80 may illustrate how this logrolling for the Yankee dollar takes place. At the same time, they may aid the untutored in grasping what Mr. Wilk means by "literary quality."

To begin with, Lyn Hejinian (a member of the Advisory Panel that chose the final 274 winners) has not only been published by Watten's This Press but has also designed and published one of Mr. Watten's books of poems (*Plasma Parallels–X*),[9] a chapbook of about a dozen pages put out by her Tuumba Press of California. (According to Charles Plymell, the Tuumba Press has also published a volume of poems written by Mr. David Wilk.[10]) So a third press can claim Barrett Watten; however, he is not the only author that Hejinian can boast of. Four other authors on the 1979–80 list of fellows have had their work done by the Tuumba Press, for a total of five. Again, those Las Vegas odds-makers would have taken a beating–five out of 3,750.

Lyn Hejinian is also published by Burning Deck, and it is through this Providence, Rhode Island, press that an even larger pattern of apparent cronyism unfolds. Burning Deck was founded in 1962 and is operated by the husband and wife team of Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop, themselves poets. In addition to publishing Hejinian's poetry, they publish their own; in fact, Rosmarie Waldrop was one of the *six* lucky Burning Deck authors who received writing fellowships last year–only one less than Big Sky! Another writer on the Burning Deck list is Jaimy Gordon who did not win a fellowship this year. However, she was one of the twelve first-screeners,[11] paid $3,000 to review the 3,750 applications and recommend about 800 to Miss Hejinian and her colleagues on the Advisory Panel for the final decisions.

Miss Gordon was the most agreeable of all those interviewed for

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[9] "That imitation distorts emphasis/ leads to a taxonomy of speech," is one of Mr. Watten's more memorable insights.

[10] Interview in the summer issue of *Newsart*, No. 7 (Sumer 1980), p. 55.

[11] The other members of the 1979–80 screening committee were Beth Bentley, Olga Broumas, S. S. Martin, Sally Ordway, Ricardo Sanchez, Jane Smiley, Robert Stepto, Brian Swann, David Trainer, Gordon Weaver, and Joy Williams.

this essay, though she initially expressed reservations about talking for publication when she was reached in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she was then a fellow of the Provincetown Art Workshop. When asked about the coincidental associations between panelists and grant recipients, she replied that what had been done was "no more sneaky than the connections big publishers have that publish each other's work and publicize each other. I'm known to be interested in unusual prose styles," she continued, "with a strong belief in people who are serious writers but who are simply not commercial writers but who are [pause] more worthy than the commercial press." It was hard work, reviewing all those applicants. "These big envelopes would come to my lonely room," Miss Gordon concluded.[12]

Miss Gordon also confirmed the Burning Deck policy of considering manuscripts by "invitation only." She had been invited to be published by the Waldrops, she reported, about the same time she was serving as the chairman of the Rhode Island Council on the Arts (another agency that helps distribute NEA funds). Eight of the invited chapbooks (with press runs between 350 and 1,000) are listed for the year 1978 by Burning Deck; no figures were available for 1979, but the January 1980 issue of *Poetry* lists a number of chapbooks received from the Providence press.

Authors who are published by Burning Deck are paid only a percentage of the copies run; for instance, a poet may receive 35 copies of his chapbook on a press run of 350, which he or she may sell or distribute among friends and relatives. This is not an unusual policy for small presses like this. On the other hand, the odds were apparently better than anyone could imagine—certainly better than panelist Ron Padgett would have bet on—that a Burning Deck author in 1979–80 might also receive a check from the Federal Government for $10,000.

Panelist Jaimy Gordon also has work in print with an outfit called Treacle, and her latest is one entitled "Private T. Pigeon's Tale," a twenty-page allegory in a style that some might consider more simple than experimental. The chapbook was published at Treacle with the help of grants from the NEA and the New York State Council on the Arts. Treacle Press is located in New Paltz, N.Y., and, coincidentally, also presents the work of Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop under its Treacle imprint. Moreover, the New Paltz firm also distributes books from the Waldrops' Burning Deck Press and has the same policy of refusing to

[12] Phone conversation, 29 January 1980.

consider unsolicited manuscripts—only particular authors are invited to be published. (Another Treacle author is a young woman whose picture, showing her wearing only a boa constrictor, is featured in the publisher's catalog. To what constituency this might appeal one can only wonder.)

Yet another press that had the good sense to solicit work from and publish Jaimy Gordon is the Sun Press of New York City. Like Burning Deck and Treacle, Sun Press publishes "no unsolicited material," and, curiously, among their invited authors is another familiar name: Ron Padgett. Mr. Padgett has coauthored a book with the owner of Sun Press, Bill Zavatsky. Mr. Zavatsky, incidentally, was another lucky winner of 10,000 bucks last year.

Known in New York City as the principal force behind the St. Mark's poetry reading series, panelist Ron Padgett, it should be recalled, was the editor and publisher of the Full Court Press. Before it went out of business, Full Court managed to publish four of those writers who received $10,000 grants last year and distributed the work of a fifth. More on that later. Two of the four published by Full Court are also on the Big Sky list, linking up this transcontinental daisy chain, and it may come as no surprise that one of the blossoms on the California list is a chapbook authored by none other than Mr. Padgett.[13]

There's more. Anne Waldman, one of panelist Padgett's editors on the defunct Full Court, also won a fellowship. So too did Maureen Owen, who has been Padgett's co-host of the St. Mark's series. Just to round things out, the St. Mark's series itself was awarded a NEA institutional grant amounting to $37,970 for the fiscal year 1980. At the very least, these facts suggest that Mr. Padgett is a man one is lucky to stand next to; it might also explain his hesitancy in betting on long shots.

The book that Padgett's Full Court Press took over the distribution of moves the inquiry out of the area of small presses and into the larger arena of the commercial houses, indicating that the "closed circle of acquaintanceship" charged in *The Washington Post* editorial had a very large circumference. Mr. Padgett reported that he had been called by Dick Gallup who said that his book of poems, published by Harper & Row, was about to go out of print. Obviously, no one wants this to happen to a friend's book, so Mr. Padgett agreed to take up the rights to that title and to continue its distribution through his own Full Court

[13] For a more comprehensive review of Mr. Padgett's prominent position in the NEA-grant establishment see the disquieting interview with Charles Plymell, *Newsart*, No. 7 (Summer 1980), pp. 7, 54–55.

Press. Mr. Gallup put Mr. Padgett in touch with his Harper & Row editor, and the transfer rights were effected. Fran McCullough was the Harper & Row senior editor involved. Fran McCullough also chaired the Advisory Panel on which Mr. Padgett served—the one that awarded the 274 fellowships last year. One of these winners was Mr. Gallup. There's more.

"I am really surprised," said Fran McCullough, "by the exhilaration some of those winners show when they receive the award."[14] It's a surprising coincidence that five Harper & Row authors received literary fellowships—more than any other commercial house and only two less than Big Sky of California. But this number does not include Ted Solotaroff, an editor at Harper & Row, who also received a fellowship, so the number might be raised to six—putting the New York house on the same level with Burning Deck. In addition, two of McCullough's panelists were Harper & Row authors, Doris Betts and Rita Mae Brown, while Jane Smiley, on the screening committee, had her first novel published by the same house in 1980. Given these connections, it's possible the cries of exhilaration that surprised Fran McCullough may have come no farther than from down the hall.

The Advisory Panel[15] was appointed, like the twelve first-screeners, by Mr. Livingston L. Biddle, Chairman of the NEA, upon recommendations made by David Wilk, the Director of the Literature Program. Mr. Wilk is a graduate of Yale University, and has published three books of verse, including the one by Lyn Hejinian's Tuumba Press. He also ran a small press and a magazine called *Truck*, as well as a distribution firm of the same name, now called *Bookslinger* (Mr. Wilk no longer has any interest in the business). Like Leonard Randolph, his controversial predecessor, David Wilk has already generated considerable criticism, but he enjoys a five-year appointment as Director. It is probably fair to say that the membership of the two panels who reviewed the 3,750 applicants in 1979 reflects his acquaintanceship within the literary world, or at least a part of it.

The first screening panel is almost entirely composed of authors

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[14] Phone conversation, 26 December 1979. Soon after this interview, McCullough was dismissed from Harper & Row. She is now working for the Dial Press.

[15] The Advisory Panelists who met in 1979 were Ron Arias, Doris Betts, Rita Mae Brown, Ann Darr, Barbara Garson, Steve Katz, Lyn Hejinian, Romulus Linney, Howard McCord, Collen McElroy, James Alan McPherson, Mark Medoff, Ron Padgett, Michael Palmer, and Thomas Sanchez.

and/or editors with connections to small presses. Each received $3,000 to read, pare down the thousands of original entries, and hand over to McCullough's judges about 800 semifinalists. As far as can be determined, this is the same procedure being followed by this year's panels; once again, the Advisory Panel members will be reviewing the group forwarded by the screeners before meeting in August to make their final decision. This last panel receives no compensation beyond a per diem for the trip to Washington, D.C.

Members of the Advisory Panel could call up for reconsideration anyone rejected by the screeners—if, of course, they knew what names were missing. Neither Mr. Wilk nor Fran McCullough could remember any writers who had been so retrieved; however, Gordon Weaver, a screener, reported his astonishment at the number of fiction writers he had vetoed in the spring who found their way into the winners' circle in the fall. In the poetry selection, Ron Padgett admitted that he had used all twelve of the "call-ups" given him, the same number permitted each of the fifteen final panelists.

Were there any guidelines to avoid conflict of interests? "I asked David," Mr. Padgett answered, "that if they had published a writer under consideration would that constitute conflict of interest? He said that if someone had published a book of mine, we [sic] would have to leave the room when that applicant was being discussed, but that having published a writer put you in a good position to understand and comment on a poet. However, if only a small pamphlet had been published [by either party], say about 15 pages, that was not considered significant enough." Given the usual size of small press chapbooks, Wilk's liberal interpretation of what constitutes conflict of interest must have forced relatively few exits.

To be fair to David Wilk, it might be said that he has inherited a bureaucratic monster, and that like his namesake, he has a struggle on his hands to bring this giant down so the Literature Program will be able to fulfill the aim of the original Congressional legislation: to support and enhance the highest quality of American literature. It's also fair to wonder, however, whether Wilk is an adversary to the monster or one of its protectors. Where does he look to find *his* constituency: among poets, writers, and playwrights whom he apparently thinks of as "enemies" or among the association of entrepreneurs who seem to have taken over the NEA Literature Program with even more expertise and bureaucratic know-how than that employed by an earlier generation that ripped off

federally funded methadone programs and food-for-the-poor? One critic, Mr. Eric Baizer in *The Literary Monitor* of California (Vol. 3, Nos. 3 & 4), suggests that Mr. Wilk may be only a friend who has lately come to camp:

> Mary MacArthur, editor-publisher of *Gallimaufry*, joined the Literature Program in 1976. She became Assistant Director of the Program in 1979. David Wilk was appointed Director in 1979. According to Hugh Fox (Stoney Hills No. 3), while on the April, 1978 CCLM grant panel Wilk lobbied to get *Gallimaufry* a grant. Wilk's wife, Jonis Agee, was a *Gallimaufry* co-editor and a 1978 fellowship recipient.

Moreover, Baizer points out, "According to a report in the *Washington Star* (January 14, 1979) five Gallimaufry Press authors received 1978 NEA fellowships" (p. 31). Perhaps the structures and procedures that Wilk inherited from Randolph were not all that unfamiliar to him.

The criticism raised in numerous small journals like *Black Rooster*, *The Texas Review*, *The Literary Monitor*, as well as in newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, all speaks to a fear that the NEA has lowered literary standards by a policy which claims to broaden the literary constituency while, in actuality, it is rewarding its own self-appointed elite. As *The New York Times* noted recently (15 January 1980):

> The argument against "elitism," which has been used to justify the current trend, is misleading. To suggest that excellence is an unworthy standard attacks the essence of art and scholarship. It serves only to cover up the politicization of programs. Democracy gives everyone a piece of the action and the ideal is to elevate all. But the effect is to level all, and to turn the levers for excellence into patronage.

Patronage and constituencies go together, and to broaden a constituency the criteria for awarding patronage must be reduced. The NEA criteria that define a "published writer" (i.e., one eligible to apply for a fellowship) can now be satisfied far too easily. To qualify, one needs to have been published in only two magazines (that themselves must have appeared only three times within three years to be considered bona fide publications). Obviously, the standards need to be raised.

For instance, if some of these small magazines and presses refuse to consider unsolicited manuscripts (as is the case with Sun, Treacle, and Burning Deck) even while they use NEA journal grants to publish their

own or each other's work (which, in turn, qualifies them for individual NEA fellowship consideration), what is the good of *any* criteria? Indeed, does not such an arrangement put the Federal Government in the position of actively supporting if not encouraging the equivalent of a sizable vanity press—and one with an elitist attitude at that?

In 1965, when the National Endowment legislation was passed by Congress, there were only a few small magazines such as *Partisan Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Paris Review*, or journals connected in some way with a university like *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, or the *Quarterly Review of Literature*. Similarly, there were not many small presses. In 1965, the Dustbook *Directory of Little Magazines* also put out its first issue, a pamphlet of less than forty pages. This year's edition is over 500 pages and lists more than 2,500 small magazines and presses.

There has been a similar growth of writing programs within the same time period. The 1981 Associated Writing Programs (AWP) catalog lists 252 creative writing programs distributed among America's colleges and universities, many of them workshops, but many also offering degrees in writing. College English Departments discovered that courses in creative writing are sometimes easier to sell to students than the more ordinary lectures on Milton and the Romantic Poets. Hiring patterns have also been affected, according to the Modern Language Association; far more writing and composition teachers are being hired these days than those in the usual disciplines. There are 792 professional writers employed full time by colleges and universities, reports the AWP.

Thousands of writers have been coming down off of commencement platforms every year for over a decade. All of them are looking for publishers or fellowships, which might be the same thing in some cases, and many of them have even started their own magazines and presses (with the help of NEA grants) to do the job for themselves. It could be said that creative writing became the macramé of the '70's.

The fellowships that will be taken home by this year's winners (now $12,500 each) will total in the millions of dollars but represent only a small part of the Literature Program's overall budget—which in turn is only a fraction (around 6% in 1979) of the funds the NEA gets from Congress. Despite noble intentions, which have seen some realization, the Literature Program has been put into jeopardy, if not disrepute, by such connections as reported in this essay. A radical overhaul of the

selection process and criteria is badly needed, and a review is supposedly underway by the Literature Program staff at this moment. One cannot help but wonder how effective such a review can be, however, when directed by entrenched bureaucrats such as Mr. Wilk and Miss MacArthur. Indeed, an article in *The New York Times* of 9 April 1981 reports that the NEA's new budget calls for an 80% cut in challenge grant programs, elimination of some other programs, but an increase of a half-million dollars in "administrative costs."

Only Ron Padgett, of all those interviewed for this article, expressed satisfaction with the selection process that awarded the 1979–80 fellowships. Everyone else—even those who felt "there will always be gripes about who got one, no matter who serves on the panels"—agreed that something had to be done. Some years ago, Harry Smith of *The Smith* suggested that fellowships be drawn as in a lottery. Recently, there has been talk of anonymous applications and submissions being instituted. But neither suggestion speaks to the matter of criteria; what authors will be eligible?

On the other hand, perhaps the whole apparatus of individual fellowships should be abolished. A good number of writers believe so, including Richard Moore:

> . . . it isn't just that the money we give to artists is being *wasted.* It's doing *positive harm.* An arts bureaucracy has grown up in the last few years to formulate the applications, select the judges, and give the right sort of ballyhoo to the recipients. There is no other way for such a system to work. And there is no way to make such a system honest. But supposing that it *is* honest, it cripples nevertheless. Only mediocrity can destroy art. And in every bureaucracy, mediocrity luxuriates. Where do the judges come from? The writers' union, of course. The solid citizens of art who have enough of a reputation to be chosen and nothing better to do than such hackwork. And they will reward those who are like themselves. They will constitute a self-perpetuating and endlessly stultifying organization that will ensure the banishment of all true talent to madness and outer darkness. Precisely that, I suspect in the depths of my heart, is the true purpose of such a system: to stamp all creativity out of a society which has grown too brittle to endure it: and for that reason I am afraid that my objection to such Government involvement in the arts may be a cry in the wilderness. [italics his] [16]

[16] *The Texas Review*, Fall, 1980. Quoted in "These Fooleries Will Please Thee Less," an article by George Garrett. Garrett's long survey of contemporary American poetry

It is difficult to dismiss Moore's analysis of what is clearly a bleak situation; some of us, however, still hope there is time for reform. The fellowships for this year have yet to be decided. The choices made by the Advisory Panel in August, with substantial carry-over membership from two years ago but under the new chairmanship of Doris Betts, will be of great importance. Will that list be composed of authors with demonstrable literary merit, a solid selection easily defended? Or will it be another pork-barrel constituency, one more luscious piece of fat the Reagan budget-cutters can hold up, ready for the knife?

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includes several commentaries such as Moore's on the bureaucracy and different growth industries that have surrounded the arts. Another of these, ironically, was a sizable excerpt from this essay of mine, which established a bibliography for it before publication. Xeroxed copies of the article, some sent by the author to confirm information contributed by different interviewees, apparently had a wide circulation within the past year.

David Wilk

A Restrained Response to "Go Down Dignified" by Hilary Masters

I would like to begin this essay by thanking the editors of *The Georgia Review* for the opportunity to respond to Mr. Masters' essay about the Literature Program, its fellowships, panelists, and staff. For reasons not entirely clear to me, this is the first time that a magazine publishing criticism of the Literature Program has chosen to offer the Endowment's response to such criticism to its readers; *The Georgia Review* deserves credit for its thoughtfulness.

Much of Mr. Masters' essay, in my opinion, is an edifice dangerously balanced on inaccurate information, unverified facts and hearsay, false assumptions, and the crude creations of literary politics. By way of correction, a list of facts comprises the bulk of this response, which, along with various documents and other information about Literature Program procedures,* clearly invalidate most of Mr. Masters' arguments.

Inaccuracies of information and personal innuendo notwithstanding, certain of the arguments raised must be addressed directly. The method of the author is to seek instances of "connections" between panelists and recipients of fellowships, in an effort to discredit many aspects of the Literature Program's efforts. In fact, even the examples given, many of which do not stand up under scrutiny, are extremely few in number with relation first to the total number of fellowships awarded in 1979 (274), and second to the total number of fellowships awarded since the inception of the category in 1972 (911, all told). To state in

* For further information concerning the Literature Program, including the NEA's Rules and Regulations Regarding Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest, the reader is invited to write to Mr. David Wilk, Director, Literature Program, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. 20506.

one breath that "many a good writer has been aided" and then to state but a few paragraphs later that "there's much evidence to suggest that merit is too seldom the prime consideration" defies reason. But it does lead straight into the argument over *process*.

The Arts Endowment as a whole, including the Literature Program, uses, and has utilized for many years, a "peer review" system of judging applications for fellowships and organizational grants. It is based on the assumption that arts professionals are the best judges of contemporary art. Artists generally seem to agree. Recently, in awarding its first PEN/Faulkner Award, PEN-South's chairperson, Mary Lee Settle, made much of the fact that it is the first award to be judged and given to writers by writers; it is a different form of recognition than publication or critical acclaim, and it is a form that is highly valued by writers who value the judgments of their peers. The Literature Program has offered a similar opportunity to American writers for almost ten years.

The criterion upon which the selection of fellowship recipients is based is *literary excellence*. The judgment of that excellence, like any other artistic judgment, is a subjective one. But it is one that the Arts Endowment values and trusts, because it is made by respected members of the literary field. There has never been a time when a list of fellowship recipients has not been greeted with some amount of consternation or criticism by members of the literary community. Many rejected applicants feel, often legitimately, that their talent and skill were not recognized by the panel, or that the composition of the panel was stacked against them. No panel can possibly include "representatives" from every school, region, tendency, or form of writing; there are, simply, far too many variations of writers. One might doubt the basis of any subjective judgment, and anyone might well be right. And anyone might reasonably disagree with the selections of any panel, however respected its members, and one might be right still—whatever right might mean in such circumstances.

Why then the howl of anger from writers such as Mr. Masters over the 1979 selections? Clearly, the presence on the panel of such poets as Ron Padgett and Lyn Hejinian was distressing to some, in light of the kinds of selections made in the poetry fellowships. Perhaps judged by some unknown objective criterion, the "right" number of fellowships that "should" be given to "New York School" or "Language School" poets was exceeded. Perhaps many other poets our critics think are better than these were not selected. Should wrongdoing automatically be

ascribed to any panelist because he or she exercised an artistic judgment, and because other panelists not of the same "school" or aesthetic stance agreed? If the fiction selections are acceptable, but the poetry selections are not, does that mean that the entire selection process is untrustworthy?

Contemporary poetry and, to a lesser extent, fiction are characterized by aesthetic, geographical, and other group factions and schools. There are Iowa School poets, New York School poets, academic poets, Midwestern poets, *New Yorker*-style poets, concrete poets, feminist poets, black poets, and many, many others. There is little agreement among writers themselves on aesthetic standards, artistic forms, and the "proper" concerns of poetry. Confessional poets may be despised en masse by some, and loved by others. Non-narrative fiction writers may war with storytellers over aesthetic issues, as well as vie with them for audiences and critical attention. Fragmentation and disagreement abound, and literary friendships are often based on artistic affiliations. The circumstances of literature cannot help but be reflected to a great degree in the role and function of the Literature Advisory Panel, for it is, after all, composed of writers. It is not possible to imagine a panel that either will make perfect judgments or, less likely still, will satisfy the aesthetic and personal opinions of our thousands of applicant writers, much less the literary community in general.

In spite of the fact that the 274 fellowships awarded in 1979 include writers from all over the United States who represent a wide variety of artistic stances and concerns, it is not and has never been proposed as a completely "balanced" list. Certainly, it reflects to some extent the taste and judgment of the panelists who made the selections. But it includes, as well, *mostly* writers with no affiliations, artistic or otherwise, to the members of the Literature Advisory Panel who judged their work to be the best that was before them for consideration. Mr. Masters may *like* the work of Arturo Vivante, Gibbons Ruark, or Raymond Carver, and he may despise the work of Peter Orlovsky, Barrett Watten, or Rosmarie Waldrop, but that is no basis upon which to disparage the value of the fellowship program.

It will be a truism for any program that attempts to support excellence in literature that it will not please all the people all the time. In all likelihood, it will please few people anytime at all. But the mission of this Literature Program is not, necessarily, to *please* writers; rather, it is to assist creativity and excellence in the field of literature, in behalf of the tax-paying citizens of the United States, who are its true "constitu-

ency." In the pursuit of that mission, this Program continually has sought to improve its policy making and application review systems. We recognize that it is the perception of many writers that these systems are not fair and evenhanded. Systems that are fair and still allow for the exercise of creative judgment do not come easily. We are certain that the systems utilized by the Literature Program, while not perfect, insure high levels of fairness and provide a reasonable means by which difficult artistic decisions can be made.

Our systems can always be made to work better, and toward this end much of the fellowship process, including its eligibility requirements and its selection process, have been changed substantially since 1979. The criterion for selection remains the literary excellence of the work submitted by each writer for consideration by the panel. That panel is still composed primarily of writers, and with its built-in rotation system, will involve an almost entirely new group of members in this year's fellowship review process. The members of that panel are distinguished writers, all of whom are committed to laboring diligently for little compensation on the massive process of selecting 200 or fewer fellowships from over 2,600 applications.

However hard these panelists work, however sound their decisions, there will be those who are angered by their failure to be recognized. There will be those who doubt the wisdom of the panelists, their seriousness, their personal honor and dedication, their "right" to have such power in the first place. Neither a perfect system nor a panel of impeccable stature and achievement can change the nature of the selection process as it affects those who are not selected. No writer can be expected to accept such a judgment easily or well, but neither should the opportunity to make creative use of the fellowship be denied to two hundred American writers biannually, simply because the selection process—any selection process—is difficult, painful, imperfect, and subjective. Writers have too little as it is to afford such a loss.

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Specific Corrections and Qualifications of Statements Made in "Go Down Dignified"

1. While Masters asserts that the fellowship recipients are considered to be "America's Best," that is not the Endowment's view, nor can that possibly be the case. As stated in our 1981 Fellowship Information Sheet (sent whenever there are questions about the fellowship process), "The list of

fellowship winners should not be construed as a list of the only talented writers in America or as a statement about literature in America. It is simply a list of those writers whose manuscripts the panel judged to be the best submitted."

2. I find it curious that the grantee referred to by Masters on page 234 was supposedly unknown to the editors of a quarterly in that region, since he has been an editor of another respected, well-known journal in the same area since 1975. I have been unable to reach the writer directly to confirm his story as reported secondhand and unconfirmed by Mr. Masters. But it is interesting to note that as far as we can ascertain, the writer in question has no direct "connections" to anyone on the Literature Panel in 1979; and his work was rated excellent first by three preliminary readers, and then by the panelists making final recommendations as well. It remains difficult to understand how one panelist can "get" anyone a fellowship, since doing so against the better judgment of other panelists would require not only herculean efforts of persuasion, but also the total abdication of artistic judgment by several other panelists. What could possibly motivate such a total abdication of professional responsibility?

3. Mr. Masters uses clever innuendo to imply that Ron Padgett was appointed to the Panel for underhanded reasons. In fact, he is only one of many panelists appointed for one-year terms under the Endowment-wide panel system, which seeks to broaden the number of panelists used by the various programs for application review. They are called "Grants Panelists," and in 1980 there were sixteen. In addition there were seventeen "Policy Panelists" whose one-year appointments are renewable up to three years of service.

4. Mr. Masters' reference to my statement about a "constituency of enemies" is a conscious act of distortion on his part; the context from which the quotation is taken shows my meaning clearly. My reference was to the feelings of the rejected applicants (93% of the total applying) toward the Endowment rather than to my own feelings toward them. One must reasonably expect any writer whose work is not judged highly enough to receive a fellowship to feel some animosity toward the source of that judgment.

5. The addresses of Serendipity Distribution, This Press, and Big Sky are the same in *Literary Market Place* because, at the time, the two presses were distributed to the trade by Serendipity. Their actual editorial addresses differed; each was an independent press with no editorial ties to the other.

6. Mr. Stefanile's statement about little magazines is, of course, his opinion, and I do not wish to engage that argument here. It should be pointed out, however, that Literature Program funds cannot be used to start a magazine

or a press, and additionally, that keeping one alive solely with federal funds is difficult, if not impossible. To date, in seven years of granting funds to small presses, 578 grants have been made to 283 different small presses. Of that number, only two have received six grants, while 151, or over half, have received only one grant. In the five years of granting funds directly to literary magazines, over 350 grants have been made to 230 different magazines. Four magazines have received grants in all five years, but 149 have received only one grant. It is almost impossible to construe four magazines as a "movement"; it is certainly improbable for a magazine to rely on the Endowment for its existence if its chances of receiving more than one grant in five years are about one in two.

7. It should be noted that Tuumba Press published my chapbook *For You/For Sure* in 1977, prior to Lyn Hejinian's appointment to the Literature Panel in 1978, and prior to my appointment as Program Director which began in February 1979.

8. Jaimy Gordon was indeed a preliminary reader in the 1979–80 fellowship round; she was one of the six who read *fiction* and whose recommendations went to the panelists judging fiction (of whom there were six). Lyn Hejinian was among the panelists who judged *poetry* (there were three others on the panel who read poetry: Michael Palmer, Ron Padgett, and Ann Darr). While Jaimy Gordon has been published by Burning Deck, other authors published by that press who received fellowships in 1979 were all poets and were not read or judged by Ms. Gordon. Similarly, since Bill Zavatsky's fellowship application was in poetry, it was not considered by Ms. Gordon. Nor was it considered by Ron Padgett, who did not participate in the review of Zavatsky's manuscript for reasons of conflict of interest. (For the same reasons, Padgett did not participate in the review or recommendation of Maureen Owen's manuscript.)

9. Similarly, Fran McCullough, as Panel Chair, did not participate in the review or voting process, except in rare instances to break ties. Since she chaired the fiction review process, she did not participate in the recommendations of the Gallup fellowship, nor did she participate in the review or selection of the manuscript submitted by her former colleague, Ted Solotaroff.

10. Much of Mr. Masters' essay is based on presumptions relating to the role of the Program staff in the application review process. As Program Director, I do not participate in the review process for any grant application. You may consult with any past or present member of the Literature Advisory Panel if you wish to ascertain the extent of my scrupulousness in following proper procedure. Furthermore, the reasons for the rejection of any applicant are always available to him or her; the staff takes extensive notes of all discussions.

11. I do not enjoy a five-year appointment as Program Director. Rather, five years is the maximum, under current Endowment policy, that a program director may serve. In fact, my initial appointment was for two years; it was renewed for an additional two years this past January. Any judgment of the success of my work is not mine to make, but I am certain in stating that no such judgment will include wrongdoing of any kind, because there has been none.

12. Mr. Masters asserts that the "membership of the two panels" judging fellowships in 1979 "reflects [my] acquaintanceship within the literary world, or at least a part of it." I must point out, first, that most of the 1979 panelists were appointed before I was employed at the Arts Endowment, and second, that the composition of the Literature Advisory Panel reflects not my own acquaintanceship, but as broadly as possible, a spectrum of the literary world itself. Having been Program Director for two years now, my acquaintanceship is fairly broad in any case, but it turns out, nonetheless, that few of the panelists appointed since I have been Director have been personally known by me prior to their appointments.

13. The 1979–80 preliminary readers numbered twelve. Of that number some may be said to have "ties" with small presses; an equal number, including most of those with "connections to small presses," have similar connections to commercial presses. If one considers writers to be "tied" or "connected" to the publishers who issue their works, then all published writers are guilty of this unspeakable sin.

14. The application review process being used in the current fellowship round is substantially different from the one used previously. A description of the process has been publicized for at least a year, so it is curious indeed that Mr. Masters appears not to know about it. The current system was devised in order to improve upon the previous one, as we have taken note of the legitimate concerns of our critics. For fiction, poetry, and other creative prose, the system works as follows:

> There are eight poetry panelists, eight fiction panelists, and three other creative prose panelists. Half of the fiction manuscripts are read by four panelists, half by the other four. Each panelist will recommend those considered to be of the highest quality for further reading. Any manuscript recommended by any one of the four will be considered further. Then, each of the "teams" will read the manuscripts recommended by the members of the other team. At the August panel meeting, all eight of the fiction panelists will select final recommendations from among the manuscripts that "passed" the first level of reading. Thus, each manuscript is read by four individuals in-

dependently; those recommended for further consideration are read by eight panelists and the final selections made from this group. There is no opportunity to "retrieve" a manuscript that was not recommended through the first level of reading.

An identical process is followed for the poetry manuscripts. Because the number of "Other Creative Prose" applications is extremely small (fewer than ninety), the three OCP panelists each will read all the manuscripts submitted in that category, and will make final selections at the August meeting. A similar process is followed for scripts.

15. A copy of the Endowment's conflict of interest guidelines is available to anyone interested. Masters' description of the procedure followed in 1979 is roughly accurate; it is not, however, my interpretation, but rather, that of the Endowment's General Counsel. Conflict of interest regulations prohibit panelists from taking any action that would create the appearance of a conflict, i.e., using public office for private gain or losing complete independence or impartiality. In accordance with the guidelines, panelists have been informed that they must abstain from application review or recommendation whenever the *appearance* of conflict might occur. Such circumstances are difficult to ascertain and instances of potential conflict often are judged on an ad hoc basis; the Office of the General Counsel is the arbiter in all such cases, but human judgment is still the issue. The peer review process brings with it many such problems. Those most knowledgeable in literary matters will most often be those who have the greatest number of potential conflicts. It is neither practical nor desirable to compose a panel of writers or editors with no connections in the field of literature. Such individuals would hardly be equipped to make literary judgments, nor could they be called "experts in the field," which is what panelists are supposed to be.

Most if not all writers have either literary affiliations or animosities or both. Members of the panel are given the responsibility of using their judgment in making selections for grants or fellowships based on excellence and other criteria included in the Endowment's legislation and policies. Countless examples of the honorable exercise of judgment by Literature Advisory Panelists far outweigh any allegedly or apparently unwise recommendations. The few examples proposed as improper by Mr. Masters cannot discredit the entire process by which decisions are reached or the members of the literary community who have served as panelists so well for so many years.

There were, in the 1979 fellowship process, many abstentions by panelists for reasons of conflict of interest. Since that time, there have been many more, as the Program and its panelists have sought to remove even the *suggestion* that decisions are reached in a biased way. This has led to some ludicrous situations: panelists have abstained because a magazine published their poems twenty years earlier, because an editor once had rejected their

work, even because a magazine had published a negative or positive review of their work sometime in the distant past. Scrupulous records of all conflicts of interest abstentions are kept and are available for public examination.

16. Eric Baizer's description of Mary MacArthur and myself as quoted whole by Mr. Masters is extremely inaccurate. Ms. MacArthur became a member of the Literature Advisory Panel in 1976, and was not a staff member until appointed Assistant Program Director in January 1979. While on the CCLM grants panel in 1978, I did not "lobby" to get *Gallimaufry* a grant; I was, along with Hugh Fox, one of five members of that committee. Each member expressed opinions and voted on applications; each spoke favorably of some applicants, and not so favorably of others. *Gallimaufry* received no more support from me than did many others, certainly no more support than Mr. Fox expressed for several of his favorite magazines. *Gallimaufry* was one of more than 100 magazines that received recommendations for support at that CCLM grants panel meeting; the quality of that magazine is indicated by the fact that it had received three grants from CCLM before 1978. Jonis Agee, my ex-wife, received a Creative Writing Fellowship in 1977, well before she became a *Gallimaufry* co-editor in 1978 for two special issues devoted to women's writing. Additionally, *no authors of books published by Gallimaufry Press* received fellowships in 1977–78 (while Ms. MacArthur was on the Literature Panel), contrary to Baizer's statement that five of them did.

17. Masters' description of the Program's eligibility requirements are out of date. In fact, the Literature Panel did feel that these requirements had become too minimal and in 1979 recommended that they be changed. The new requirements were recommended at an open meeting of the Literature Panel in October 1979, were approved by the National Council on the Arts in November 1979, published in March 1980, and distributed to thousands of writers and literary organizations in the months following. The new requirements are that poets have published a minimum of twenty poems in five different magazines, or a book of poems, and that fiction and other creative prose writers have published at least five pieces in two magazines, or a book. Reactions to these new requirements clearly indicate that opinion on such issues among writers is divided; fears have been expressed by some that such difficult requirements might discriminate against minority and feminist writers whose access to publication is most limited among writers. In fact, the number of applications has only been reduced from some 3,200 in fiction, poetry, and other creative prose in 1979, to some 2,500 in the same categories in 1981. The percentage of women and ethnic minority applicants is, as far as we can determine, higher in this round than it has ever been in the past.

18. It must be pointed out that the refusal of some small presses to consider unsolicited work for publication is not germane to the review of applications

by this program for fellowships. While the vast majority of commercial publishers follow a similar policy, most small presses do not. Further, current requirements disallow vanity or self-publication in the establishment of eligibility. Yet over 2,500 creative writers have found it possible to apply this year, and there is no doubt that many other writers meet the requirements, even though, for whatever reasons, they did not apply this year. Furthermore, the list of those writers who have received fellowships since 1972 now numbers over 900, including hundreds of America's foremost poets, fiction writers, essayists, and playwrights. Regardless of who is published and by whom, this list belies Masters' criticism of the validity of the selection process.

19. Certainly, Literature Program support has contributed to the publication of many books and magazine issues. But to ascribe the growth in the number of small presses and literary magazines solely to the availability of federal funds is ludicrous in the extreme. Assistance to Small Presses, available only since 1975, has gone in extremely limited amounts to some 283 presses of the many hundreds that have existed since that time. Partial support in the form of matching grants cannot be responsible for the incredible efflorescence of small presses and literary magazines in this country. Yet the importance of the Endowment's support to such publications should not be undervalued; how many writers or critics could be convinced that publication of poetry should be left to commercial publishers, whose total production of volumes of poetry is less than 25 each year? Certainly among the productions of the small presses and literary magazines supported with federal funds, many will prove to be of little lasting value. Precisely the same can be said of commercially produced publications and also of the many literary magazines, small presses, and university presses that have ever published without grant support. All literary publishing is subjective, highly risky, and prone to be judged harshly with the benefit of hindsight and critical distance. Out of the many judgments made daily by editors and publishers, few will prove to be of lasting value to literature or to society. But without the many that do not last, how would writers learn their craft or readers know enough to make their own judgments, or critics have anything against which to measure excellence? Literature, like culture or natural selection, is a process. What parts of it withstand the tests of time and change cannot be predicted in advance; without its failures there can be no lasting successes.

20. Masters asserts that the fellowships "represent only a small part of the Literature Program's overall budget." To the contrary, the fellowships have amounted to roughly one-third of the Literature Program's budget in recent years, and in FY 1982 will account for 36% of total funds. The Literature Program now accounts for approximately 4% of the Endowment's total program funds.

21. Indeed, the Program has studied its entire process of application review over the course of the past year, and has questioned not only the review

process but all of its funding categories as well. Improvements have been made and will continue to be made in the future. As well as changing its eligibility requirements for the current round, the Program has proposed that the judging of applications be made anonymous beginning in 1982.

22. Silly as it may be, I cannot resist enjoying the notion of myself as an "entrenched bureaucrat," as I am described by Mr. Masters. If two years in government service and the prospect of no more than five altogether doth entrenchment make, I must plead guilty. But I would rather think that the image of the bureaucrat is simply a convenient one for the author of this essay to use in bolstering the emotional impact of a rather empty case. I have come only lately from the same literary world as Mr. Masters and am not far from returning to it; I have little, if any, vested interest in building or sustaining a bureaucracy.

23. The quote from Richard Moore suggests that panel members are chosen from "the writers' union." This strikes me as a curious statement, not only because there is no such thing in this country, but because anyone looking at the Literature Advisory Panel's composition would have a difficult time characterizing its members as "hacks." I will not quarrel with those who believe that government has no proper place in supporting the creative arts, but if the alternative to current practice is to be proposed, it should be argued on the basis of fact, not fiction and fantasy.

24. Contrary to Masters' assertion that the Advisory Panel that will judge fellowships this year is substantially the same in membership as it was in 1979, only three of the twenty members judging fiction, poetry, and creative prose were involved in the review process in 1979. It is hardly a holdover panel. Judging work in these categories for the 1981–82 fellowship selection process are the following panelists: Doris Betts (Chair), Rudolfo Anaya, Toni Cade Bambara, Rita Mae Brown, Michael Dennis Browne, Jayne Cortez, Hoyt Fuller (who was in the midst of the evaluation process at the time of his sudden death on 11 May 1981), William Gass, Francine du Plessix Gray, Joy Harjo, Michael Harper, Calvin Hernton, George Hitchcock, Lawson Inada, Josephine Jacobsen, Diane Johnson, Grace Paley, Thomas Sanchez, Gilbert Sorrentino, and Dara Wier.