

awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1967 and was appointed Commander of the British Empire in the New Year Honours List in 1986 for his services to poetry.

The Ingersoll Foundation is the philanthropic division of Ingersoll Milling Machine Company of Rock-

ford, Illinois. The Rockford Institute administers the prizes. Past recipients of the T.S. Eliot Award include George Garrett (1989), Walker Percy (1988), Octavio Paz (1987), V.S. Naipaul (1986), Eugene Ionesco (1985), Anthony Powell (1984), and Jorge Luis Borges (1983). E.O. Wilson

(1989), Edward Shils (1988), Josef Pieper (1987), Andrew Lytle (1986), Robert Nisbet (1985), Russell Kirk (1984), and James Burnham (1983) are previous recipients of the Richard M. Weaver Award.

Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

Until the discovery in the spring of 1989 that the National Endowment for the Arts was conducting tax-supported amphibious landings on the farther shores of anatomy, physiology, and abnormal psychology, probably few Americans had ever heard of the relatively obscure agency that presides over the floating wreckage of the American arts. Founded in 1965 and with an annual budget costing less than a good battleship, the NEA has gloried in the anonymity that bureaucrats and the avant-garde underworld covet. But once the light of publicity had begun to shine on the NEA's woodwork, and the maggoty creatures that infest it had started scrambling for their beloved darkness, the bureau that serves as a kind of federal gestapo of the dominant culture quickly became a synonym for the sewage in which these august personages love to wallow.

The first scandal arose from the revelation that the agency had helped finance exhibitions of the work of the late Robert Mapplethorpe, now deceased of AIDS, who had missed his true vocation of dressing women's hair, arranging flowers, or selling antiques and had instead dedicated his genius to the high and mysterious art of photography. Mr. Mapplethorpe was indeed a man of no small talent and reportedly commanded no less than \$20,000 for a sitting. Had he confined his career to perpetuating the images of weddings and commencements and capturing the toothless gapes of bubbling infants, he might have passed on to the great Turkish bathhouse in the sky with nary a peep from his following or his adversaries. But, as it developed, Mapplethorpe concocted the notion that he was called to employ his gifts in en-

shrining on film forever some of his favorite recreations. Since the content of most of these pictures is such that not even adult bookstores could display them with impunity, he had no recourse but to call them "art."

What exactly these photographs depict may not be fully described in such wholesome publications as *Chronicles*, and indeed their precise characterization might elude even one of such jaded imagination as your correspondent. One may search the works of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis in vain to find parallels to some of the deviations Mapplethorpe relished.

L'Affaire Mapplethorpe might have passed with merely the usual struttings and expectorations from congressmen who saw in it a convenient vehicle for posturing as latter-day Catos, but it soon was followed by the exposure of even more bizarre practices that the NEA had helped to finance. There was the case of Andres Serrano, who delights in portraying objects of religious devotion immersed in urine and who readily acknowledges his preoccupation with bodily fluids of all kinds. Later there were confirmed reports of NEA support for the exotic entertainments devised by the guild of "performance artists," most of which make Mapplethorpe's creations look like the crossword puzzles in *Jack 'n' Jill*. Aside from the live nudity, dabbles in excrement, and contortions of bodily orifices in which these artists delight, their work also emits what the performers are pleased to claim as political pronouncements. Although the political meaning of the acts escaped most of those who witnessed them or read accounts in the yellow press, the artists themselves were eager to explain that they were exposing the "oppression of women" and other forms of "cultural hegemony" inflicted on us by the

sinister and ubiquitous "Eurocentrists" and their heterosexual cohorts.

As the world now knows, the whole sordid mess was seized upon by religious fanatics, conservative congressmen, New York cab drivers, and other fossilized representatives of nearly extinct political species who imagined that there might be something objectionable in using the moneys handed up by taxpayers to finance the production and exhibition of works these same taxpayers found abhorrent. As the temperature of the congressional battle escalated, platoons of actors, actresses, and aesthetes of all descriptions bellied up to the bars on Capitol Hill to explain with their customary hauteur why taxpayers and other white trash should shut up, fork over, and docilely submit to the subsidized subversion of their own institutions.

To their credit, a number of congressmen thought otherwise, and for the past year or so they have been trying to draft legislation that would prohibit the NEA from sponsoring obscenity, blasphemy, and other objectionable excesses of liberated speech. North Carolina's Senator Jesse Helms and California's Representative Dana Rohrabacher took the lead in trying to trim the NEA's lurid sails. But in the end they failed. Just before Congress scuttled off to tell the voters how much it had done for them in the past two years, it voted to reauthorize the NEA without any significant "content restrictions." It is noteworthy that President Bush played an important role in stopping legislation for such restrictions by coming out against it at a key moment in the debate.

In lieu of strong restrictions, it is probable that next year will see the revelation of even more scandals of the Mapplethorpe-Serrano-"performance artist" kidney and that the struggle in

Congress will resume. Next time, one may hope, congressmen willing to do battle on the NEA issue will come loaded with heavier ammunition than they carried this year.

What conservative legislators need to do is not merely rest with restricting the content of what the NEA subsidizes but advance to questioning the whole concept of federal sponsorship of the arts. In the battle just concluded, they didn't do that, but confined their attention simply to efforts to eliminate obscenity and blasphemy. That omission points to a flaw in contemporary conservative political tactics and perhaps to an underlying misconception of what conservatives should be fighting for and against.

Conservative wrath about the NEA seems to have derived mainly from outrage at the misuse of public funds for unseemly projects and from realization that dwelling on such abuses would accrue to the political benefit of officeholders bold enough to campaign against them. But by failing to connect these abuses with the actual functioning and purposes of the NEA, proponents of "content restrictions" missed an opportunity to "raise consciousness," as our friends on the left like to put it, and thereby to mount a far more radical challenge to the dominance of liberalism than they expressed.

The ostensible rationale for the NEA, a creature of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation of 1965, is, as President Johnson put it in asking for its creation, that "Government can seek to create conditions under which the arts can flourish." But the demand for federal support for the arts (and the humanities) was also an expression of the interests of the cultural and intellectual elites that have flourished in the United States throughout this century. Federal support for the sciences after World War II and following the Soviet launching of Sputnik excited the appetites of humanists and artists, who began to fear that they weren't getting their fair share of the federal boodle, and both the inept John Kennedy and the far more efficacious Johnson sought to set up an agency that would fatten and tame these literati.

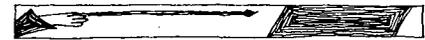
The federal care and feeding of the intelligentsia, especially that part of it lodged in such mass bureaucratic and managerial organizations as universities

and foundations, has been as fundamental to 20th-century liberalism as analogous catering to business titans has been to the Republican Party. In the 1960's, the cultural and intellectual elite played a crucial role both in writing the mood music for the New Frontier and the Great Society and in actually designing the sets and writing the script. "The liberal mood of 1960," writes historian Allen J. Matusow, "was largely defined by elite intellectuals residing on the East Coast, principally in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Constituting an intense subculture at the center of the nation's communication network, these intellectuals—nearly all of them liberals—shared a world view that profoundly influenced the political climate in this election year." The NEA—and to an even larger extent its sister agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities—were not only the eggheads' payoff for their support of the Democrats and their agenda but also an effort to wed or fuse permanently the intellectual and cultural elites with the managerial leviathan in Washington.

Of course, it wasn't the first such wedding. Historian Richard Hofstadter pointed out that in the Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the new, enlarged scale of intellectual and cultural institutions, paralleling the similar expansion of business and governments—"large universities with adequate libraries, laboratories, huge endowments, graduate schools, professional schools, and advancing salaries"—were essential to the whole Progressivist project in the state. "The development of regulative and humane legislation," wrote Hofstadter, "required the skills of lawyers and economists, sociologists and political scientists, in the writing of laws and in the staffing of administrative and regulative bodies. Controversy over such issues created a new market for the books and magazine articles of the experts and engendered a new respect for their specialized knowledge. Reform brought with it the brain trust." In the Depression, Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration undertook the first formal engagement of the intelligentsia and the state, and it paid off when, as Hofstadter recognized, "a generation of artists and

intellectuals was nursed through a trying period and became wedded to the New Deal and devoted to Roosevelt liberalism." Not only did the intellectuals need liberalism, but also liberalism needed the intellectuals.

Since the real—as opposed to the ostensible—purpose of this fusion of state and culture was to facilitate the social reconstruction and engineering that liberalism championed, the "abuses" of the NEA really ought not to surprise us. The subversion of "Eurocentric," "male chauvinist," and "homophobic" institutions and beliefs is only the most recent stage of the never-ending struggle to liberate us from the American Way and replace it with the emancipated and militant cosmopolitanism of what is now openly called the New World Order. Obstacles to the entrenchment of that order—and of its transnational bureaucratic and technocratic elites—such as the integrity of American cultural tradition and the social institutions that support it have to be "deconstructed" if the elites are to perfect their own cultural hegemony. So far from "abusing" the funds appropriated for the NEA, Mapplethorpe, Serrano, the performance artists, and the munchkins who awarded them their grants were simply breeding the ideological progeny that the marriage of state and intelligentsia has promised from the first.



If conservative politicians are really going to resist the deracination that the NEA has come to symbolize, they will have to broaden their attack on it beyond moralism and fiscal responsibility. Restricting the content of publicly funded art to stop only the most offensive productions will accomplish little to preserve traditional norms and institutions from the federally endowed assault on them. Mapplethorpe and Company offer a valuable opportunity to inform Americans of exactly what is really going on in the belly of the beast, why it is going on, and why it is so difficult to stop. It remains to be seen whether contemporary conservatives have the imagination to understand the challenge or the courage to confront it, let alone any desire to resist it seriously in the first place. ◊



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Loser in a Lawn Chair

by Thomas Fleming

We are often accused of looking on the dark side of everything. One editorialist even found it amusing that we occasionally compared contemporary America with the Byzantine Empire, as if such a comparison were not an insult to the Christian civilization of Constantinople. Despite our reputation, we like to think of ourselves as hardheaded optimists, and we thought it would be amusing to play Pollyanna for a change. For my own part, what I have to offer resembles, at least in tone, *The Consolation of Philosophy* more than *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

It is not always easy to discern the line of demarcation that divides one era from another, but whatever else it might mean, this century has been the painful weaning process in which European and American man has cut himself off from the civilization that gave him birth. The ancient classics, the faiths rooted in the Scriptures, the artistic and intellectual methods that took shape in the Renaissance—all of these survive now only here and there in little monastic pockets of specialized learning or sectarian commitment. But for the most part the Christian and classical culture so ardently defended in the earlier years of this century by Carducci, Belloc, and Eliot now are reduced to so much

bric-a-brac in museums and fine-print type in a guidebook to Europe.

What is the bright side of cultural dissolution? Simply this. Such things have happened before, and they will happen again. There are lives worth living to be lead now as much as any time before, and those of us who put their faith in the maker of all things must realize that if things must get much worse before they get better, they will, nonetheless, get better. Since so much that good men have labored for is now out of our hands as individuals, we can concentrate on the only things that have ever really mattered.

This is a hard lesson for European man, who has always found it difficult to take life as it comes. It was a Hellenized Phoenician—not a Greek—who founded Stoicism, and it was no accident that such a creed of resignation became popular during an era in which the old world of the Greek polis was breaking down, to be replaced by kingdoms, cosmopolitan empires, and bureaucracy. A typical Alexandrian Greek might have come from Cyrene or Rhodes and could spend his life in the service of Macedonian kings and in the company of strangers. The old political life of the assembly, marketplace, and council was now as much an