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Kerr, John Hoare (1978-1984): Correspondence 04

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4 Dec '88

To those most interested in an accurate portrait of Nancy Hanks and her educational accomplishments:

The author of "Nancy Hanks: An intimate portrait," Michael Straight

The Administrator, Hanks Endowment to Duke University

The President, The Rockefeller Bros. Fund, & att: Laurance Rockefeller

The Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

The President, Duke University Duke University Press

from: John Hoare Kerr, esq.

Former Director of Education of the National Endowment for the Arts for the entire term of Nancy Hanks and chief architect with Nancy Hanks of her national Artists in Schools Program AIS which was her major contribution and effort in education.

Greetings:

Reluctantly, but in fairness to the memory of Nancy Hanks, in a spirit of somewhat disillusioned good will for Michael Straight, but determination to correct the record concerning a great lady and skillful leader, may I at some length point out areas of grave inaccuracy in the book "Nancy Hanks: An Intimate Portrait" which must not be allowed to further circulate without correction and retraction in the interest of historic accuracy and fairness to the reputations and careers involved which have been much defamed and slandered, not the least Nancy Hanks' and my own.

For her 8 year term I was Nancy Hanks' trusted Director of Education with our main program being Artists in Schools, AIS. Please refer to the 36 Chapter, page 250, paragraph 2. Contrary to the statement there, Nancy and I did most assuredly build on John D. Rockefeller, 3rd's initiative in the most appropriate manner to the Endowments primary mission mandated by Congress by placing a number of artists through our AIS program in the schools and project sites of the network funded by the JDR 3rd Fund of John D Rockefeller, 3rd. This reflected Nancy Hanks' tact in not competing with the JDR 3rd Fund efforts but rather offering them a major area of support where their funding had been too tightly stretched in other areas to accommodate much, as Kathryn Bloom of the JDR 3rd fund indicated she felt/^{it}would be helpful to the concept John D Rockefeller 3rd advocated. This cooperation with USOE and JDR 3rd in planning and funding research applied to theory is well documented in these agencies' and foundations' files of the period for anyone wishing to seriously examine the issue.

Thus, the lead sentence in paragraph 2, page 250 does Nancy Hanks and her Director of Education, John Heare Kerr, and all the planners and participants in this cooperative effort a grave injustice, Further more we funded additional joint projects with the JDR 3rd fund which were dear to John D Rockefeller, 3rd's heart and concept. One of these was one I had been working on under Roger Stevens and later the interim acting Chairman Doug MacAgee. Nancy saw immediately that while it was most appropriate to USOE and Harold Arberg's Arts Education division and the JDR 3rd Fund, it was important for the Endowment to take its slender Education budget generously into the project going thirds with USOE and JDR, 3rd Fund in a most generous grant. The fruits of her decision are flourishing to date. I personally spent many days with the grantees at Nancy Hanks behest all over the USA at meetings which drew artists and college and school professors, teachers, and administrators together as was almost unprecedented hitherto. Again this is all carefully documented in Endowment files, USOE files, JDR 3rd files, College Board CEEB Advance Placement Files for any serious student of Nancy Hanks' aggressive steps to build on what the author referred to as "Rockefeller's brilliant initiative". It took some sagacity and educational courage for Nancy Hanks to build on this initiative as when I had attempted to interest the former President of Brown who was still Chairman of the Humanities Endowment in this project he had replied (both of us having houses in R.I.) "John, I have some sunken realestate in R.I. I'd like to palm off on you, too". While admiring his wit, Nancy stepped in with heavy funding to support a project directly in line with "Rockefeller's brilliant initiative".

Frankly, Nancy Hanks was not so naive as she is portrayed by her Deputy Chairman in the education field. She was aware that with a small budget and limited funding, even with transferred funds from USOE, and a primary mission for artists, she had to be selective, keeping her program direct and simple, one easily understood with immediate benefit and quality that would be highly visible. The author falls victim to repeating the same vile canards set afloat by detractors of her highly successful educational efforts: that the Endowment (in his book read Nancy Hanks) was blundering into guerilla hit and run programming and that the Director of her programs had no national stature, and that ^{visual} artists were by an large a disruptive force, and the AIS program was all hype... with

a weary li tany of educationists' guerilla tactics Nancy put in appropriate perspective...even to the last days of her term giving her detractors and those of AIS ample time to present their concerns even before the National Council in a meeting^{in which} I recall sitting beside Michael Straight, as he chaired it. She did move to address these concerns, many of which could have been silenced by discreet funding of the most vociferous who ranted about the program in print. Alas, for quiet, they seldom produced applications that were fundable under the high standards prevailing at the time.

One again, with advice from me and all her other program directors and many of the early National Council members (before the appointment of the educationist advocate Mr Boyd to the Council) , and a number of States Art Agency leaders, Nancy kept the main focus in education at the Endowment in making the study and practice of the arts as integral in the education of Americans ("Rockefeller's brilliant initiative") where her mandate dictated she must, on artists and their role in this concept. This did not indicate she knew little of our education system as the author states on page 250, but rather that she knew enough about artists and the system to know they had much to offer each other in building on the "Rockefeller brilliant initiative". It is one Nancy supported and few would argue with it, least of all Nancy Hanks...Nancy was a strong force in an Endowment helpful role in arts education, the author's selective quotes from press releases and speeches taken out of context notwithstanding, pg 254. On that same page the Straight memo was probably not answered simply as what he was advocating was what we were already doing in the above efforts I have listed which are still ongoing in the system today. The fact the author has not realized that speaks well for Nancy's delicacy in not replying.

Our artist oriented singlemindedness, as long as it was congruent with the "Rockefeller brilliant initiative" , and it always was, Nancy encouraged as her own. The great success of this highly controversial (simply as the ones threatened by its success made it so) effort was praised by superintendants and teachers and artists and students alike...who had benefited by it. Our files and those of State Arts Agencies attest to that for anyone who cares to search out the balanced view. Like

every ongoing applied research program, there were successes and failures. The former Nancy built upon, the latter she learned from and we set to rights next round as soon as possible. Nancy Hanks high standards were honored in the merit of AIS, ongoing today. The fact it was originally, as many new concepts, attacked by those with often a hidden agenda, the fact the author has trivialized Nancy Hanks, her program director (me), and her grasp of educational needs in his cavalier and superficial unresearched (properly) chapter 36, or the fact the author "poo-poes" AIS great success at the time in visual arts by seeking out scattered failures, does not alter AIS merit or Nancy Hanks' astute entrance into the field of arts education. Long after projects of other agencies and foundations have fallen away with their weight, Nancy Hanks' initiatives have endured. Pretty good record for one characterized on page 250 as knowing little about our education system! If the arts educationists had known how to improve arts education, it is fair to assume they would have done it long before Nancy Hanks did it through AIS. Her success gives the lie to the statement she knew little about our education system. Nancy was astute enough to flatter experts that she was in awe of their greater educational knowledge when it suited her goal ahead. In practice few knew educational needs and the systems' successes and failures in meeting these in the arts better than Nancy Hanks. There is absolutely no reason to rewrite history to minimize the vast improvement AIS brought to education under Nancy Hanks. We must leave it to those who followed Nancy and me as national leaders in AIS to evaluate if they have maintained the high standards set throughout the 8 years of her Chairmanship when we initiated an entirely new field, Artists in Schools. Having been the first to propose this emphasis to her as the most appropriate avenue for Endowment funding, and having joined her in taking the lead in its development with national and state and local education and arts agencies all over America, it became my field. Naturally, we both held national stature in that field as the originators of a cohesive all arts AIS approach and as funders and conveners of national meeting and planning sessions. The fact that Nancy seldom attended but relied on me to carry the ball did not lessen my national stature in AIS...rather the reverse. Thus, having represented Nancy and her entire education effort at gatherings and task forces ranging thru

White House, National Federal Agencies, State and local agencies, foundations, all over USA, I was accorded national stature. Therefore, additionally as it reflects on Nancy Hanks' judgement in entrusting major national educational responsibility for AIS, etc to me for 8 years, I sadly take issue that the author erroneously claims (page 253 last paragraph) with one "8 year stature-erradicating" and misinformed arbitrary stroke of his pen that there was no program director of national stature in 1972. The very fact that I was her (and before that Roger Stevens) program director in 1972 and I ran her national program as lead planner and administrator representing the Endowment at national meetings and planning sessions in a multi-million dollar grants program in AIS, and the largest arts education funding nationally at the time, by definition conferred national stature on me... though my detractors may regret that fact. It would not be denied by the author who so savaged AIS and Miss Hanks educational knowledge, that Endowment program directors by the very force of their grants in their field from their national programs have achieved national stature in that field. It cannot be otherwise... particularly if the program director has been the chief architect with Nancy Hanks in creating a whole new field which he continues to administer and guide, as I did in AIS, nationally. Even as powerful and authoritarian stroke of the pen as that of Nancy's Deputy Chairman cannot change that fact. To do so is libelous or slanderous depending on voice or pen and as I noted above is to trivialize the then program director, even if, as the author did, one avoids naming the program director... who remains known to most of the people still active from the wonderful Hanks years, and the author has done irreparable harm to not only my 8 fine AIS years under this stratagem but to the judgement of Nancy Hanks as the implication is she trusted a man of no stature nationally in the years as Chairman, no stature in the field he built and lead as the chief administrative and policy person working always in tandem with Nancy Hanks. The author sadly will be believed so great is his popularity, so high his former position, so readable his book which will serve as a text for future attitudes toward Nancy Hanks and her stature-less program director. Already my own sons have questioned the matter... and in future (with out doubt) the label will stick. It is no consolation for Nancy she is dead or me I am unnamed but falsely branded as of no national stature after very creative hard work achieving a national break-thru in education.

The author's bald statement therefore violates fact and short of a court injunction on grounds of irreparable harm, or our cooperative effort to withdraw the publication to correct facts, these misrepresentations will become accepted historical fact. Duke University would not publish such a flawed dissertation, yet it published this making a travesty of fact. The author and the University who published this are certainly dabbling in libel. While the author may have hoped to shield both by not naming me personally, by attacking Nancy's judgement when she is now but a memory, there are too many alive today who know my role under Nancy, and the memory of Nancy is too sacred to many to permit her defamation, either. The very title of the chapter "Education: A Guerrilla operation" does us both disservice. It is not so. But we will be judged by Michael's errors in assessment and distortions. As for the assertion page 252 paragraph 3 the program was put together in a hurry...no more than Goya's masterpieces that after years of skill were done in 20 minutes. It was not hurry but years of managerial skill and knowledge that allowed Nancy, me, our advisers to move with all deliberate speed.

It is curious that had the author stated page 253 last paragraph a qualification for the program director to the sense that: an arts educationist for program director of national stature was lacking in 1972, there would be no inaccuracy as I was not an arts educationist and never will be nor will I ever seek national stature as such, believe me.

I was definitely not, nor am I now after 8 years heading AIS under the Hanks years an educationist in thought or background. IN brief, my background after a simple BA Yale 1955 in Political Science: Foreign relations with courses in art history, and at Yale School of Fine Arts courses in studio art, and at Boston Museum School of Fine Arts, and The Art Students League of NYC in studio art, included very responsible executive and diplomatic assignments: in US Army, U.N. (US Committee for UNICEF), a Rockefeller foundation, The Smithsonian as expert in American Art and collection planning and building, in W.Va a museum curator and Director...V/P Nelson Rockefeller lent paintings to exhibit...

and in India a senior (the youngest) U S Cultural diplomat (Cultural Consul for South India at Madras).

Roger Stevens hired me after India and Nancy Hanks kept me on and supported and trusted me in my AIS goals which she not only added to but made her own personal preserve that the author had little to do with generally except to Chair Council discussion (when Nancy asked) and once to ceremonially greet Congressman Brademas at a National AIS meeting he visited in Indiana at Notre Dame I arranged with my Panel Chairman. One assumes had either Roger Stevens or Nancy Hanks doubted my ability to hold national stature in a national program, they would have gotten rid of me or my application. Or had either wanted an arts educationist in the slot they would have chosen from the plethora available who would readily have jumped at a salary that was the highest of the Endowment program directors for 8 years and more. As for national stature, even after Nancy left, I was internationally in demand in AIS and travelled abroad to advise and speak on the program I had made famous with Nancy Hanks in America. Yet I agree AIS success made me as well as Nancy in some circles a controversial figure, but that is the price of selfless service often. Only Mother Theresa seems to have escaped.

Another point that haunts me is that whatever situation existed between State Arts Agencies, Nancy, and myself in a program that I was once told (by Lenord Paz then head of State Arts Agencies) was being used to test State Arts Agencies' equal status with the Endowment, it is to our everlasting credit Nancy and I placed our faith in State Arts Agencies by firmly planting AIS in their hands to administer so that it would survive (as it has) and not be swallowed up by the competing pressures national programs felt elsewhere in education. On page 254 that fact might have been helpful in the author's oversimplified view of the function of the very productive and hard working AIS panel so skillfully Chaired by Dr Thomas Bergen, Dean of Continuing Education at Notre Dame University and a man close to State Art Agency responsibility in Indiana who later sat on the National Council for the Arts under Livingston Biddle, after I was no longer a factor in AIS leadership, when Livingston Biddle fired all Nancy Hanks program

directors, in my case illegally as was finally determined, after years of litigation, by the US District Court in a very expensive, protracted battle which ruined my health already weakened by service to my country in a post notorious for its health hazards in India. The EEOC simultaneously ruled in my favour also. Nancy and I placed great faith and responsibility for AIS in States Arts Agencies, it is for them to assess if in our hour of need they gave us that same degree of support. For Nancy's part it was a third term in question, and the State Arts Agencies supported historically Livingston Biddle. In my case it was my career. I do not recall anyone but myself being overly concerned that career was not savaged except the EEOC and the US Court system and my two brilliant attorneys over the years, with the exception of the First Lady whom the President had referred my case to after Jean Mendale had refused to acknowledge any justice in my appeal. Mrs Carter insisted I be given a fair hearing which I was concerned I have. Because I knew my struggle would embarrass former colleagues who might fear retaliation themselves for contact with me, and because I did not want to involve others (particularly Nancy Hanks) in my attempts to protect my career rights, I endured the pariah status thrust on anyone who fights the abuse of an ouster that violates law as the court system ruled Biddle's ouster of me did, and as EEOC independently did. Ironically by the time of my victory Biddle was out and the new Chairman fought vigorously the orders to ^{fully} reinstate me for reasons best known to himself but which I suspect had much to do with the savaging of my reputation by such as the educationist and National Council member Mr Boyd who presided over a group who gave me zero ratings for my knowledge and ability. I still have the ratings. Naturally I am not about to have the author further take away from me and from Nancy Hanks the successes and strides we made together by his treatment in this chapter. I have spent 4 days agonizing over this treatment and writing you in hope I will not be forced again to take the route for career justice for Nancy and myself thru the courts I had to take for many years. For Nancy's beloved and endowed alma mater to so savage her by publication of the author's off-hand, cavalier chapter on AIS and Nancy's role in arts involvement in education is to bite the hand that thru the Hanks Endowment feeds Duke. With friends like the author and his publisher one is forced to ask oneself the old bromide, who needs an enemy? For in fact the author has violated the most elementary rule

the most naive graduate student or PhD candidate knows by heart...one must go to primary sources and one cannot ignore these factual sources . There were two people who knew most intimately the full scope of Nancy Hanks involvement in AIS better than anyone else during her 8 years sharing with me, in tandem, the leadership that made it a nationally recognized success. Those people obviously were Nancy and me. Nancy from beyond the grave cannot defend herself so I must. All this could have been avoided if the author had troubled to contact me at this address the Endowment has, the social register has, the old issues of Washington's green book had, and past issues of "Whose Who in the East" had, and I have written the author from with reply on several occasions, and the author could assume, as in the past, I would have come to him, if possible, as I did when I lunched with him at his house in Maryland when he was writing a previous book whose title I believe was "Nest of Eagles"...but memory may not serve me on the title. Devine Providence has given the author a marvelous literary talent, a distinguished career, a gentlemanly manner and concern for those less blessed with power, position, and responsibility than life has showered on him. To use that so devastatingly historically against the subjects in this chapter is malice without contact with the surviving primary source as any graduate student claiming history as justification for research knows must be done, and to have such shoddy "scholarship" deified in Duke University Press (by a University the recipient of the Hanks Trust) is a travesty of Academic reward for scholarly researched publication by the imprematur of University publication...Naturally the University as well as the author must face facts and correct the matter that will if .let stand be the definitive word today and years to come. A grand lady's reputation and that of her trusted program director and the program they put together are at stake here...as is Duke University's standard for scholarship and publication, not to mention the author's reputation and conscience. It is no excuse for the author to say "I did not know what happened to you or where you were". I have had this address in the country for over 30 years . I , having been forced into retirement by post Nancy Hanks Endowment savaging of my career, now live permanently here. I can assure all no attempt was ever made to consult me as the surviving primary source. The matter cannot rest anymore than could Endowment savaging of my career until justice is done.

I cannot close this analysis of Chapter 36 without noting that it was Nancy Hanks' sensitivity to the needs of educationist in the arts and her faith that all points of view, given a fair airing, can work in harmony with artists to achieve what the author calls "Rockefeller's brilliant initiative"... and not incidentally her own thru AIS.... that brought her to fund (with my applause as her program director be sure) thru education at the Endowment with the JDR 3rd Fund and USOE and others the massive study from the brilliant panel assembled and Chaired by David Rockefeller, Jr which issued the report "Coming to Our Senses". It is for those who followed Nancy Hanks and myself in the education area at the National Endowment to answer as to what use they and their generation of arts and education leaders put that report. It was a major effort of her interest in arts education and to his credit the author refers to it in Chapter 36. It showed she was well aware of the needs of the education system, to fund it. I monitored the grant for her

Please let me know if the ^{National Endowment for the Arts} ~~Endowment~~ had any hand in funding this book Who Did?

I close this with a firm prayer and hope that you all will join with me to withdraw this repugnant Chapter for scholarly revision to conform to fact by recalling from the sellers all copies, scraping these, to protect not only academic integrity of the university imprimatur bestowed by the very fact of publication, but to provide protection for the reputation of a great lady who cannot from the grave defend herself, AIS, or those of us who in the Hanks years built the program to success, not the least of these as noted above being me and my career reputation now and in the future... as I have fairly demonstrated once again the truism that faulty and off-hand and careless even callous research cannot help but bring about faulty conclusions. I contact you all asking your good offices in discreetly accomplishing this for the minimum embarrassment for all.

I ask your indulgence on my pick and hunt typing and editing skills. I have not the author's literary gift and must admit to (as Dona Mitchell noted Nancy Hanks had at one time) few typing skills ... particularly on this typewriter rented to spare you my written scrawl. May I hear from each one of you or your representative before the New Year as to

how we may work together to accomplish what I have asked with
 dispatch. First I knew of the book was a post publication news clipping
 sent to me.

With all good wishes for a friendly resolve of this matter in the
 interest of truth and scholarly integrity of research as exemplified
 by the Duke University and Press remedying matters with the author.
 I recall to you a Biblical scene: Christ is before Pilot and states
 his unity with Truth. The worldly administrator with his ear to the
 fickle mob states with one can imagine what scorn (that must have
 been equal to Stalin's "The Pope, how many divisions has he?"), ...
 "Truth, What is that?". Later Pilot called for water after handing
 his victim over to the mob and said "I wash my hands of this just man".
 I appeal to each one of you not to emulate Pilot, handing a great lady's
 reputation and that of her trusted program director and the AIS program
 they conceived and nurtured for 8 wonderful years together, to the
 historic violence of Chapter 36. All my life I have found Truth will
 prevail eventually. Once when we were faced with a hopeless quandry
 I jokingly suggested to Nancy.. "We could always lie... " Brushing aside
 my joke which was at best gallows humor, she replied, "John I have
 never approved of a lie not the least reason being no one is clever
 enough to entangle themselves without tripping themselves up in the
 resulting buttressing lies...aside from the moral reasons primary."
 I share her faith that you will honor Truth over expediency in this
 matter. So I ask the publication be withdrawn on receipt of this letter!

Sincerely

John Hoare Kerr, esq.