

# Book prize farce, not honor

BY PHILIP MCFEE  
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

A month ago, I bemoaned the current state of high-profile literature, blasting a scene in which the "9/11 Commission Report" could be nominated for the National Book Award.

Yes, things have been better, and yes, the "9/11 Commission" isn't purist literature per se, but the blame doesn't lie with the book, it falls on the jacket flap.

On a little gold sticker that's graced many volumes: on the National Book Award.

And, hell, if I could turn my thoughts on said sticker into a 400-page yarn on the powers of memory and redemption in contemporary society, I might be on my way to procuring one myself.

Really, the "9/11 Commission Report" isn't terrible. It's not even bad — it's toned down, well written and unmistakably important. John

Updike went so far as to say, "The King James Bible (is) our language's lone masterpiece produced by committee, at least until this year's 9/11 Commission Report."

When you think about it, what else is?

But why celebrate its accomplishment at what's been called by many the Academy Awards of the Literary Community?

Like the Oscars, the award frequently is given on the basis of significance rather than deservedness. It's a pat-on-the-back handed over to comeback novels and chart successes.

To meet the criteria, an author must either make waves from the limelight, break through to the mainstream or, more often, create "an epic vision of love and morality, loss and vision in a world torn apart by strife."

Or something like that. It's a career builder or icing on the cake. It can make an author's career prodigious or an exit distinguished. But it's not worth a quarter the gravitas as a Pulitzer, to be mentioned

in the same sentence as the PEN awards or even stacked beside the National Book Critics Circle Award.

The genre nominees often are similar, the small committees steered by a charismatic chairman who exerts his or her subtle influence on the ultimate picks.

But winners are still major award recipients, which leads to a damaging after-effect: the assumption of literary celebrity.

Literary celebrity breeds pretense, which in turn manufactures a dangerous brand of author whose self-assuredness overshadows any smidgen of credibility.

Of course, this runs most rampant in fiction. Stephen Ambrose, in his lifetime, never won for nonfiction — but he probably could receive a lifetime achievement award.

After all, Stephen King did. But, in the midst of all this big name-forging, where are the big names? The Ozicks, the Munros or, especially in 2004, the Roths?

In The New York Times Book Review, former National Book Award winner by no fault of his

own, Jonathan Franzen, questioned the middling fame of fiction master Alice Munro.

But the chances that someone like Canada's Munro or another pre-established literary mainstay winning the National Book Award are slim to nil.

It's a political ceremony, and, in the end, will continue to play to hot-list talents, at least in the fiction-writing realm, rewarding ambition over accomplishment, concept past content.

It turns out the "9/11 Commission" didn't win, but, even if it did, the real problem wouldn't go away. The award should be just that: an acknowledgement of the significant achievements of an American talent.

If it's a national award, it's time to draw the line between memorable and meritorious.

But, for now, I'm just giving up. How much is that illustrated "Da Vinci Code"?

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## DOLE

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party building.

"She's positioned herself to be a player, to be a person of influence," he said.

Though she is new to the Senate, Dole is no stranger to Washington, D.C., and has a long track record — from U.S. secretary of transportation to secretary of labor.

"Elizabeth Dole is not a typical, run-of-the-mill, first-term senator," Guillory said. "She's comfortable playing on the national stage. She saw an opportunity and seized it."

Still, Dole's new position will require a careful balancing act for someone already stretched thin. In addition to volunteering as national director of education and information for Hospice, she serves on major Senate committees, such as armed services and agriculture.

But Dole always has touted her dedication to North Carolina, emphasizing that she will not leave her home state in the dust.

She has criticized Edwards in the past for missing votes crucial to his home state while campaigning with former presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry.

This new commitment will not be a problem for Dole, said David Snapp, press secretary for Sen. George Allen, R-Va., outgoing NRSC chairman.

"(It won't be a problem) for somebody with the energy that Senator Dole brings to the job," Snapp said. "She will continue being a steadfast supporter of

North Carolina values while at the same time reaching out and putting in effective candidates."

The senator's new position high on the totem pole only means she can help her state more, said Brian Nick, press secretary for Dole.

"She joined the leadership team, so she will be in regular leadership meetings and it gives her an opportunity to put North Carolina issues on the forefront," Nick said. "It allows her to be part of shaping what the agenda is for the Congress."

Senators always play dual roles, Guillory said, balancing a myriad of responsibilities.

"Senators are always a combination of state figures and national figures," he said.

Guillory said Dole will be more connected to leadership, but her success will be contingent on whether Republicans do well in the 2006 elections and how she chooses to use her new power.

"It all depends on how she uses and how she spends her time," he said.

Burr said Dole will continue to serve North Carolina, as well as to find effective leadership at the national Senate level.

"I think she certainly represents the values of the majority of the Republican Party and the values of North Carolina," he said.

"Her sights will be broadened as it relates to the type of candidate that she recruits. ... They won't all be out of the traditional political mode."

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## CURRICULUM

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who have traveled overseas to share their experiences in area public schools. She said the University should push students to travel and to broaden their understanding of international issues.

"If I didn't have the opportunity (to study abroad), I would be a different person," she said.

But curriculum innovations and an increased exposure to study abroad programs are not enough to prepare students for interactions in a global society, said journalism Professor Robert Stevenson, who teaches a course in international communications.

"If you look at the study abroad programs, almost all entail no more than a semester in an English-speaking program," he said. "What I would like to see is a requirement across the entire University of mastery of a second language."

Stevenson said UNC students

still lag far behind much of the global culture, which requires proficiency in a second language.

The Curriculum Revision Steering Committee was interested in requiring students to take four levels of a foreign language, but funding limitations restricted these options.

A lack of available funding and the cap on nonresident students also restrict the potential for international growth at the University.

But officials are optimistic that the implementation of the new curriculum will help inspire students to take a more global approach to their education.

"In the years ahead," Kalleberg said, "students will become much more exposed to international aspects of their work by simply learning how to cope with an increasingly global world, not only as workers but as citizens."

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## REVIEW

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President.

By the beginning of the semester, Moeser had compiled a 12-page sampling of what he considered key accomplishments at the University from August 2000 until June 2004 for his self-assessment.

The list includes the implementation of several large-scale policy changes, which range from appointing several top administrators to launching the Carolina Connects tour, a public relations campaign to strengthen the University's ties to each corner of the state.

Moeser's term as chancellor has been marked by efforts to end binding early decision admissions and to pursue academic initiatives that include securing approval for the Academic Plan, proposing policy changes on an 18-percent cap for out-of-state students and launching the Carolina Covenant.

During his address at the board's meeting, Moeser spoke of the success of this initiative to allow the state's poorest students to graduate debt free.

"We have taken a leadership role nationally," he said. "It is a project designed to ensure success for these students."

Moeser also has led efforts to

secure a stable source of funding for the University. He has campaigned for the approval of the statewide Higher Education Bond Referendum, managed budgets exceeding \$1.4 billion and embarked on the University's Carolina First Campaign, a \$1.8 billion private fund-raising initiative.


And the physical structure of campus has taken on a new form during Moeser's term with the implementation of the Campus Master Plan and the revitalization of planning for Carolina North, a 50-year proposal for a mixed-use research facility.

The work of several top administrators, including Provost Robert Shelton; Matt Kupec, vice chancellor for University advancement; and Nancy Suttentfield, vice chancellor for finance and administration, also is under review this year.

They all were recruited to the University soon after Moeser stepped into his position in the fall of 2000 and are ready for their five-year evaluations.

"What it really does is it forces really, really busy people to sit down and take a deep breath and review their work," Shelton said.

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## POPE CENTER

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escalating controversy surrounding the Pope Foundation's possible multimillion dollar donation.

Opponents say accepting funds from the Pope Foundation to create a program in Western studies would give the organization too much influence over the curriculum.

Officials from the foundation maintain that the University initiated the program.

"We got a request for \$25,000 for the planning stage, and we naturally donated the money," said Art Pope, former state senator and co-founder of the Pope Foundation. "All we're trying to do is support education and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill."

Committee members rejected the idea that the money influenced their decisions.

"Yes, there was a summer stipend made to people who served on the committee," said Lloyd Kramer, chairman of the Department of History and a recipient of the funds. "But I insist that the people who were given this stipend were in no way forced to develop this specific study."

He stressed that it is not unusual for faculty to receive summer funding for course development. Summer funding usually comes in the form of seed money, provided to a department to create courses.

Kramer said faculty were not instructed on how to use the funds and added that he donated the money he received to the history department's special fund.

"I only accepted because I thought it was a good way to get funding for the history department," he said.

Some faculty members further questioned the approval process for the program during last Friday's Faculty Council meeting and made jokes about some committee members being "bought off."

"It's a conflict of interest when you're paid to develop something for the person who paid you," Cravey said. "This whole situation revealed that it's a tainted process."

He criticized the course development process and said it is in need of reform. "If we cave in to the lure of money, we might as well close our doors, because we no longer offer what we have historically stood for."

Contact the University Editor at [udesk@unc.edu](mailto:udesk@unc.edu).

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