

"The British don't really like writers unless they are very old, in which case they get the O.M., or very dead, in which case they get eulogies on T.V."

Barry Norman, Daily Mail, 28th August, 1968.

"Britain comes pretty low in the World Literary Award Stakes. Our top prize is a mere £1,000, which is puny; compared to some American handouts. So far, it also lacks the prestige of the French prizes, such as the Goncourt, which guarantees an automatic print order of 50,000."

Atticus, Sunday Times, 23rd June, 1968.

On Thursday 3rd October 1968, a press conference has been arranged by the Publishers' Association and Booker McConnell Ltd. to launch the Booker Prize for Fiction. The Publishers' Association, representing the British publishing world, had for some time been planning to launch a really significant literary prize. By coincidence, Booker McConnell Ltd. (see over for details) were considering a similar idea. Representatives of the two organisations met and compared ideas.

As a result there is to be a new £5,000 annual prize for fiction, guaranteed for the next seven years. This is the first example of major industrial sponsorship of literature, although this kind of support is already well-known in the fields of music, art and sport. It comes at a particularly relevant moment when writers in other countries are under attack and will, ~~it is hoped~~, go a long way towards increasing the public's awareness of the important part played by writers in the world today.

There are already almost fifty literary prizes and awards available in this country, ranging from inscribed quills to sums of £1,000, for almost every conceivable type of literary work and category of author. One particularly charming one, for a lyric poem, brings its lucky winner 'a bronze medal together with a sum of money (about £4.8.6d. less the cost of the medal)'. This is almost exactly the equivalent, financially, of the French Prix Goncourt, but it doesn't take a very astute observer of the British press to note that the latter probably gets more space in British papers than all the British prizes put together.

The Booker Prize ~~for Fiction~~ will be awarded to the best novel, in the opinion of the judges, to have been published between December 1st and the following November 30th, and the first award will be made in early April 1969. Any novel by a writer from Britain, the Commonwealth or the Republic of ^{Ireland} ~~Ire~~ and South Africa which has been first published in Britain between these dates will be potentially eligible. Publishers may submit not more than two books from their lists and the judges are free to call in any others which they feel they would like to

consider. A short list of possible winners will be released four to six weeks before the final decision is made so that the sort of speculation so beloved in France will be possible in Britain for the first time, thus stimulating interest in more than one book and one author.

Dave Rebecca
West,
David Farrer

For the first year the panel of judges is chaired by W. L. Webb, Literary Editor of the Guardian and the other members are Frank Kermode (critic), David Farrer (publisher) and Stephen Spender.

See over for biographical notes on the judges.

Although the sum of £5,000 will be a generous reward to the winning author, we hope that his real success will be a significant increase in the sales of his book and that this will to some extent be shared by not only the authors who have been short-listed, but, in the long run, by authors all over the country. A substantial literary prize should mean that a writer does not need to be censored, imprisoned, or labelled outrageous and controversial before hitting the headlines and the bestseller lists. and will, we hope, help to narrow the gap all too frequent gap between artistic and commercial success.

~~A sub lit. pr. award. concentration~~

Details of other literary prizes will be found in the Writer's & Artists Year Book (p. 328).

Webb
West
Spender
Kermode
Farrer.

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THE JUDGES

W.L. Webb, the Chairman, has been Literary Editor of the Guardian since 1960. Aged 40, he was educated at the Cathedral Choir School in Manchester and read an honours course in Modern Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, where he edited the College's student magazine and conducted the college singers.

He founded the Guardian Fiction Prize of 200 guineas 'for work of originality and promise' in 1965, has twice edited 'The Bedside Guardian' and is currently working on a social history of Manchester for Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Dame Rebecca West, was born in 1892 and educated at George Watson's Ladies' College in Edinburgh. She has contributed to many English and American newspapers as a literary critic and political writer and is a Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among her books are: Black Lamb and Grey Falcon, The Fountain Overflows and The Birds Fall Down.

Stephen Spender, C.B.E. was born in 1909 and educated at University College School and University College, Oxford. He has held a number of academic posts and delivered the Clark Lectures in Cambridge in 1966 and the Mellon Lectures in Washington D.C. in 1968. Among his books are The Destructive Element, The Creative Element, The Struggle of the Modern, Collected Poems and Selected Poems. He has translated Rilke and Schiller's Mary Stuart. He is currently working on a book on student protest.

Frank Kermode is Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English Literature at University College, London. Aged 48, he was educated at Douglas High School (Isle of Man) and Liverpool University. He edited the Arden edition of The Tempest in 1954, and his books include The Romantic Image, John Donne, The Living Milton, Wallace Stevens, Puzzles and Epiphanies, The Sense of an Ending and Continuities.

David Farrer has been a Director of Secker and Warburg Ltd. since 1947. Born in 1906, he was educated at Rugby and Balliol, where he was a history scholar. He was called to the Bar in 1930, and 'failed at the Bar 1930-1935'. He was guardian and tutor to the Maharaja of Gwalior between 1936 and 1938, cable censor at the Ministry of Information from 1939 to 1940 and Personal Secretary to Lord Beaverbrook from 1940 to 1946. He is currently writing, for publication next Spring by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, a personal memoir of Lord Beaverbrook, provisionally entitled G for God Almighty.

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BOOKER McCONNELL LTD.

Booker McConnell is the parent company of the Booker Group which comprises a large number of businesses in various parts of the Commonwealth. The main operations in which Bookers are involved are: sugar production in Guyana (where the Group originated), Jamaica, Nigeria and other parts of Africa; shopkeeping and wholesale distribution in Britain, the Caribbean, Zambia and Malawi; shipping in the Caribbean and Britain, including a cargo service between Britain and the Caribbean; rum marketing throughout the world, allied to distilling in Demerara and Jamaica; engineering in Britain, including the manufacture of sugar machinery, centrifugal pumps, central heating equipment and mining machinery; light industries of many kinds in the Caribbean and Central Africa; and, most recently, investment in writers' companies.

Despite its wide variety of interests. Booker McConnell is, in British terms, a medium sized company. It has net trading assets of £40,000,000 and employs 29,000 people of whom 5,000 are in Britain.