

for committee members.

DRAFT

for consideration & comment please

BOOKERS BOOKS	Date: 1/2/72
ACTION:	Copies

3/2

David Holloway, Esq,  
The Daily Telegraph,  
135 Fleet Street,  
LONDON, E.C.4.

Dear David,

John has asked me to reply to your letter to him of 9th January about the Booker Prize, but I should make it very clear that I am not really writing personally, but conveying the general and unanimous feelings and attitudes of the Chairman of the Committee and its members.

First we would like to thank you for your continued interest in the Prize and your serious and constructive approach to it. We would like to thank you too for the generous things you say when you say you think we may have got much nearer to a breakthrough at the third shot than we did at the first two. This is how we see things ourselves and we are naturally pleased about it as we have always sought (to use your own words) "to break through the indifference barrier".

If we have read your letter correctly it would seem that your argument hinges on two main points:

1. That there was an avalanche of serious novels in the autumn of 1971 during the Booker Prize period - and this is what you are referring to when you say "well, now we have been hurt".
2. That this avalanche was due to the new timing of the Booker Prize and the new arrangements that went with that timing.

I don't think that anyone is going to dispute that the autumn of 1971 produced a very large crop of novels of the serious or verging on the serious. So we are ad idem on this one.

As regards your second point we are ~~very~~ short of any widespread evidence that this avalanche owed anything to the timing of the Booker Prize. Between us all we know of only one [single] title among all London publishers that was actually put back to a later date in the year to get into the Prize ~~and~~. [ Do you know for certain that many others were deliberately postponed for this reason? You must allow us to doubt whether this avalanche was caused by our new arrangements. ]

per (out)

After long and detailed discussion, not least with regard to your letter, we have decided to go ahead with the 1972 Prize on a basis that will be <sup>Autumn</sup> [nearly identical with] the 1971 plan, though there will be some [slight] modifications in dates. We also want to make it more explicitly clear to publishers - though really you would think that to anyone who read last years' rules carefully the facts would be plain enough - that the panel is free to call in novels published from January 1st of the year in question and therefore it doesn't at all follow like the night the day that the winning novel has to be or will be published within the favoured period.

each publisher is asked to submit a list of titles for consideration published after 1st January 1971 from which the judges may decide on titles which should be called in.

I think we all feel we owe you some sort of explanation of the thinking that has led up to this decision, whether the decision be right or wrong. We are certainly not arguing that the greater success of the third Prize was due to autumn publication and the nearly simultaneous publication of the book with the announcement of the short list, etc. This would be an impossible thing to prove or disprove, but we would like to submit the two main points behind our thinking:

1. Our experience has been (as indeed I don't need to tell you) that to revive a novel six, nine or twelve months after its publication and after its run through its full original sales potential as exploited by the publishers is completely impossible. It arouses no interest or controversy, it sells no copies, it does nobody any good except the surprised author who suddenly gets £5,000 out of the past. That of course is fine, but it is not going to make a success of the Prize in the terms of breaking your "indifference barrier".

2. The Prix Goncourt which we have always kept an eye on as a kind of example that is not wholly relevant works very much on simultaneous autumn timing. This is as you know inordinately successful and although I am not familiar with the particulars of the literary pages and reviewing of contemporary novels in France it is evident that editors, reviewers, publishers and bookshops manage to keep up with the situation somehow. It is hard to believe that the same cannot be managed here, though a rather tiresome period of adjustment may be necessary. We believe this on balance to be worth while, or at least worth the effort.

[ It may be argued too that no prize was ever really successful unless surrounded by a fearful hollaballoo of controversy! We have done nothing to stir this up, nor shall we, but it seems likely that sooner or later it will stir itself up of its own accord - and I

am naturally talking about much more large-scale rump<sup>u</sup>passes than is contained in a friendly exchange of letters between yourself and the Committee! ]

We were all delighted about what you said about the occasion of the Prize giving and its date, and we plan to try and do as nearly as possible exactly the same this year. Thank you again for such a carefully thought out and obviously sympathetic argument and I only hope you will agree that it is a problem that has two sides to it and the balance of decision is difficult.

Lord Hardinge of Penshurst

L. P.