

BOOKER  
INTERNAL  
MEMORANDUM

To GSB  
From PMS  
Date 30 November 1972  
Subject Booker Prize 1972

I attach the press cuttings concerning the 1972 Booker Prize award.

Information concerning John Berger's possible reaction to his winning the Booker Prize first came to me on the Tuesday before the prize-giving via Marilyn Edwards, the secretary of the Booker Prize Committee. She had been told, in confidence, by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Berger's publishers, that his first reaction was to refuse to accept the prize, although he was grateful for the literary honour. Marilyn Edward felt that she should warn us of this possibility and kept closely in touch with the situation on our behalf. On the Thursday morning, Weidenfeld's gave Marilyn Edwards a verbal synopsis of the speech Berger would make at the dinner, namely that he would attack the source of the £5000, Booker McConnell, but accept it and announce that half of it would be shared with the Black Panther movement.

On receipt of this information, it was agreed at a meeting with MHC, MCWW and DHJ, the only directors present at the time, that we would not attempt to reply to any attack made at the dinner and in order that we would not be placed in a position where we might have to comment on Berger's speech, that the order of the speakers should be changed. WMR, who was to have spoken last, was therefore asked to speak immediately after Roy Jenkins and before the formal announcement of the winner was made.

On arrival at the Cafe Royal, Marilyn Edwards told me that she had been told at 6.00 pm that John Berger's speech had been released to the press by Weidenfeld & Nicolson earlier that afternoon and that no copy had been sent to her. I then asked the publicity director of Weidenfeld's if I could have a copy of the speech and he refused to give me a copy until after the dinner. It was perfectly apparent by his reaction that he did not think we knew what the speech contained and that he thought that if we had known we might have tried to stop it being made. This would account for his attempted secrecy earlier with Marilyn Edwards.

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The speeches took place in the revised order. WMR spoke for about seven minutes and Berger's speech, while listened to in the main in silence, was interrupted by two or three interjections from the audience. Berger was the last speaker and on the formal closing of the dinner was immediately surrounded by a large number of the press present. The most prominent questioner of the group was Peter Grosvenor of the Daily Express, who took the line that Berger should not have accepted any part of the prize if his feelings about the sponsors were really as he had expressed them. This is the line that has also been taken by most of the press comments.

WMR also spoke to the press for about 15 minutes. The only reactions to Bookers' attitudes which have appeared were in the Times of 24 November and the Sunday Telegraph of 27 November.

PMS