

Dear Miss Edwards -

My considered reply. I suppose all will be loose. I'm sorry about that  
Saul Bellow

October 6, 1971

Mr. John Gross

11 OCT 1971

Dear John,

I was rather worried as the meeting came to an end, and saw a similar uneasiness also in John Fowles. Neither of us felt that the Naipaul book could be considered a full length work of fiction. I felt that In a Free State was uneven and lacked unity, and I several times denied that it was a book. I voted for Mr. Naipaul's talent, and would cast another vote for that. Of all the novelists we had before us, he seemed the deepest and the best, and I hoped that the award could be justified under the rules of the Booker Committee.

Your statement of the 27th claimed that the Naipaul book was "unified and coherent." Relying on a generous interpretation of the rules, I assumed that the judges had discretionary powers and might determine eligibility entirely by themselves. Again I voted for Naipaul's talent, and not for the book.

Your wire, however, makes it plain that I am not voting for Mr. Naipaul's talent but for his full length novel. When you put it to me in those terms, I must say, no. In a Free State is not a full length novel. This is an awkward and nasty business and I can't say that I feel that I am altogether innocent. Our problem would have been simpler if there had been anyone in the running who approached Naipaul in ability. As a writer, he clearly led the rest. Fowles' objection to his book is, however, entirely legitimate and I feel obliged to agree with him.

I assume that Goshawk Squadron is out of the running and, having looked again into Doris Lessing, I am unwilling to give the prize to her. My vote, therefore, goes with much regret and many reservations to Mordecai Richler.

I hope you will accord me the privilege of a Cardinal and burn my ballot when the Pope has been named.

All best,

Saul Bellow

work of fiction