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**Its aim was to stimulate
the reading and discussion of
contemporary fiction.**

<https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-prize-story>

What is it?

The **Booker Prize** was first awarded in 1969. Its aim was to stimulate the reading and discussion of contemporary fiction. The hope was that newly published work would eventually become as central to Anglophone culture as Francophone fiction was to France, thanks to the **Prix Goncourt** – France's highest literary honor.
(see Related Articles, below)

The publishers Tom Maschler and Graham C Greene, who came up with the idea, found a backer in **Booker McConnell**, a conglomerate with a significant long-term presence in **Guyana**. The company had recently acquired a commercial interest in literary estates.

Ian Fleming, a good friend and golfing partner of Booker Chairman Jock Campbell, had died in 1964. Before he did, Campbell established an 'authors' division' within Booker, and bought (for £100,000) a 51% share in the profits from worldwide royalties on Fleming's books. The Booker Authors' Division would go on to acquire the copyrights of Agatha Christie, Georgette Heyer and Harold Pinter, among others.

Thus a prize for writers and readers of the Commonwealth – not just Britain – was born. In 1969, the inaugural Booker Prize was awarded to



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P.H. Newby for his novel **Something to Answer For**. Thirty years later, Booker Chairman Michael Caine would write that 'The Booker Prize can trace its origin, through quirks of history and the imaginativeness of one individual, to James Bond and **the attainment of political freedom in Guyana**'. (Guyana had gained independence in 1966.)



P.H. Newby at his desk © P.H. Newby Literary Estate

The life of the Booker Prize over the past half-century has exceeded the imaginings of its founders several times over. The BBC first televised the prize ceremony in 1976, and the level of conversation, competition and controversy increased exponentially in the years that followed.

In the 21st century, winning the Booker Prize can change a writer's life, and grant him or her a readership for many decades to come.



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Related Articles

The Goncourt Prize Gets Americanized

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/11/07/the-goncourt-prize-gets-americanized>

The overseers of France's biggest literary honor convene a group of American university students to vote on the first-ever U.S. version of the award, after much snorting over aesthetic differences.

Reported by:
Katy Waldman,
October 31, 2022