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Stevie Marsden

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LITERARY PRIZE CULTURES: A FAIRER FUTURE?

STEVIE MARSDEN

In June 2022, Costa Coffee, a British coffee shop chain and subsidiary of Whitbread PLC, announced that they would no longer be running the Costa Book Awards (CB Awards), one of the UK's most significant series of awards for fiction, children's books, poetry, non-fiction, and short fiction. The awards were founded by Whitbread in 1971 and became the CB Awards in 2006 when Costa Coffee (a subsidiary of Whitbread) took over sponsorship of the prizes. The cancellation of the awards was sudden, with many from the world of publishing and literature, including former judges for the award such as Nelle Andrew taking to Twitter to express their devastation and frustration (Comerford, 'Trade') at this 'shock' news (Armitstead). What's more, in the weeks that followed, more prizes seemed to follow suit, with the Blue Peter Book Awards for children's literature, the *Sunday Times* Short Story Award (for 2023), and the Desmond Elliott Award being cancelled or put on hiatus due to a lack of sponsorship. While the comings and goings of cultural awards, and near-constant threat to their financial security, is by no means a new phenomenon, the announcements of the termination of the CB Awards, alongside a series of other UK prizes ending or admitting financial uncertainty, exposed the precarity of the cultural award sector more broadly. Some of the UK's wealthiest and most recognisable prizes, such as the Women's Prize for Fiction (WPF) and the Booker Prize, have seen significant changes to their sponsorship and funding models in recent years, with the WPF moving to a 'family of sponsors' (Campbell) and The Man Group ending their eighteen-year sponsorship of the Booker in 2019 and the US charitable foundation Crankstart taking over sponsorship of the prize (Chandler, 'New Booker'). The demise of, or threat to, long-standing literary awards in the UK can be used as a point of examination of the current funding and organisational model(s) favoured by prize-giving organisations to ascertain their sustainability and longevity. The termination of some of the most prominent and commercial literary awards in the UK suggests that such literary award models require a rethink of what prizes should contribute to culture and how. Accordingly, this article considers the current administrative and funding models of literary awards and questions whether we need to reassess how awards should celebrate and reward cultural achievements, and sustainable ways in which they can continue to support creators.

THE UK LITERARY AWARD SCENE

The UK is home to some of the oldest and most well-known literary awards. From the James Tait Black and Hawthornden Prizes, both established in 1919 and still presented and supported by their original administrators and sponsors – the University of Edinburgh and the Hawthornden Trust and Drue Heinz, respectively – to this day, to the Booker Prize and the WPF, first awarded in 1969 and 1996, respectively, the UK boasts a particularly prolific and influential literary awards scene. This is both in terms of economic capital (currently, the Booker boasts a prize fund of £50,000 and the WPF winner receives £30,000) and cultural capital (the Booker has historically been viewed as an 'international' award but only expanded its terms of eligibility from authors in the Commonwealth, Ireland, or Zimbabwe to any author writing in English, in 2013 (BBC, 'Global Expansion')). The Booker's expansion was met with concern from publishers and industry figures in the UK, who argued that the rule change risked enabling 'the dominance of Anglo-American writers at the expense of others' (Cain).

It has been argued that the Nobel Prizes, founded in Sweden and first awarded in 1901, were 'definitively implicated in the process of proliferation' in prize

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culture at the turn of the century (English 61). In other words, while prizes in arts and culture had existed before the Nobel Prizes (and James F English provides insight into this in his 2005 book, *The Economy of Prestige*), it was the Nobel Prizes, English argues, which really influenced the formation of the modern cultural award as we know it today. There are examples of awards that were explicit in their origination as corrective, if not rival, prizes to other (non-Nobel) prizes, such as the Booker Prize being inspired by France's Prix Goncourt (Moseley 3), the WPF being founded due to an all-male Booker shortlist in 1991 (Marsden 175), and, more recently, prizes being established to respond to the overall inequities in representation in prize culture (such as the Jhalak Prize for 'fiction, non-fiction, short stories, graphics novels, poetry and all other genres' and Jhalak Children's and YA Prize for UK writers of colour (Jhalak Prize) and the Goldsmith's Prize for 'fiction that breaks the mould or extends the possibilities of the novel form' (Goldsmiths University of London)). Nonetheless, there is some credence in the argument that the Nobel Prizes provided a foundation from which what we might call the 'typical typology' of cultural awards was formulated. This typology includes, at the most basic level: terms of eligibility (which indicate who is and is not eligible for an award); a submission process (during which time entrants are identified and submitted); a panel of judges (usually considered to be 'experts' in the respective field); a shortlist or longlist announcement (this is not always the case, the Nobel Prizes do not announce a shortlist of nominated individuals, for example, but it is more common than not, particularly for commercially motivated awards); and a prize-giving ceremony or announcement where (usually) one winner is revealed (ceremonies range significantly from lavish exclusive dinners, to public announcements at book festivals, but there is typically an expectation for the winner to receive a monetary prize). There are subversions of this final stage, with judges selecting two winners, sometimes against the terms of the prize itself, as in 2019 when the Booker was shared between Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo. The judges' decision to share the award between Atwood and Evaristo was a controversial one, not only because it went against the prize's own rules (and it was reported that the prize's literary director, Gaby Wood, 'repeatedly' told the judging panel they could not split the award (Flood, 'Margaret Atwood')), but also because Evaristo was the first Black woman and first Black British author to ever win the prize. Many were concerned that splitting the award detracted from Evaristo's historic win, with the author herself stating: 'If the first black woman to win the Booker Prize had won it on her own, that would be a different statement' (Lawton np).

To return to the prize typology, it generally applies to awards for cultural products and achievements, such as writing, music, art, television, film, and sport. While this typology is applicable to many awards and is indicative of the current model of prize-giving generally employed in the UK, other factors drive the extent of a prize's power and influence. Possibly the most influential aspect in a prize's ability to make both a cultural and commercial impact is its monetary provisions. Prizes do not only need money for prize funds, but also for overheads including administrative staff, marketing, and events. As Claire Squires notes:

> Ostensibly, what every book award might claim to do is recognise and reward value. A corollary part of this mission is, then, the promotion of the winner or winners: literary prizes can bring relatively unknown writers to public recognition, enhance the reputation of already established authors, turn the attention of the media to books and so support the consumption of literature generally. (*Marketing Literature* 97)

Elsewhere, Squires has expanded on the significance of literary awards as 'an effective weapon in the book marketer's armoury', due to publishers' use of stickers and winner banners on new editions (Baverstock, whom Squires quotes, and Cachin and Ducas-Spaes (2003) have also referred to the paratextual uses of literary prizes in book marketing). Using the Booker Prize as a specific example, Squires notes that the organisers of the prize 'stress the importance of marketing' for the award:

> The conditions of the award stipulate that publishers must comply with co-promotional activity … In 2005, this included a contribution of £3,000 to 'general publicity' for any book reaching the shortlist, and an undertaking to 'spend not less than £1,000 on direct, paid for media advertising of the winning book, including a winning poster or showcard, within three months of the announcement of the award. ('Book Marketing' (73))

As recently as 2020, this contribution of funds towards marketing Booker shortlisted and winning books remained a stipulation of the prize's terms and had increased to £5,000 for both shortlisted titles and winners (winning titles would therefore contribute £10,000 in total to prize marketing) (Booker Prize, 'The 2020 Booker Prize for Fiction'). However, the 2022 Booker Entry Form stated that 'Publishers are no longer required to make a financial contribution if they have a book shortlisted or if it wins the prize' ('The 2022 Booker Prize for Fiction').

The Booker is not the only literary award to require contributions towards marketing from publishers. The WPF's terms of entry for 2023 also stipulate that publishers will contribute £5,500 (plus VAT) if their book is shortlisted and a further £6,000 (plus VAT) if the book wins ('Women's Prize for Fiction 2023' (1–2). This is on top of publishers supplying twenty-five copies of longlisted titles, an additional seventy copies if the book is shortlisted, and another fifty copies if the book wins. Publishers also need to agree to sell books that reach any stage 'to the Women's Prize Trust at a minimum of 70% discount for promotional use or outreach initiatives in perpetuity' ('Women's Prize for Fiction 2023' 1–2). There is also a £1,000 (plus VAT) contribution requested from publishers of longlisted titles, but publishers can appeal this if the 'expenditure would prove prohibitive' ('Women's Prize for Fiction 2023' 1). The CB Awards also required contributions from publishers of winning titles to Costa Coffee 'towards the general promotion of the winning books' ('Terms and Conditions of Entry'). The publishers of the five CB Award category winners were required to contribute £5,000 and the winner of the overall Book of the Year Award would need to contribute a further £6,000. But, like the WPF, the CB Awards did note that the condition was 'subject to confidential appeal by a Costa Award Winner or Costa Book of the Year publisher for whom such expenditure would prove prohibitive' ('Terms and Conditions of Entry'). This decision by the WPF and CB Awards may be an acknowledgement of the challenges of such expenses for smaller, independent publishers. Thus, while marketing is one of the key expenditures for literary awards, in some cases contribution to these funds is a prerequisite of partaking in the award itself.

The CB Awards were likely one of the most expensive prizes to run in the UK. Each of the winners of the prize's five categories – Novel, First Novel, Children's Book, Poetry, and Biography – received £5,000 each. From this list of winners, an 'overall' Costa Book of the Year winner would be selected, and win a further £30,000. This is a model currently replicated by the Saltire Society Literary Awards ('Scotland's National Book Awards') and once favoured by the Commonwealth Book Prize (which ended in 2013), which was divided into five regional winners from Africa, Europe and Canada, Caribbean, Pacific, and Asia, from which one overall winner was selected (Foyles). Such prize models provide further opportunities for authors and provide an additional boost in both publicity and economic resource for the overall winner, but are costly. Overall, the total prize fund for the CB awards was £50,000 (Costa, 'Costa Winners 2006–Present'). In 2012, Costa also introduced a short story award, the winner of which would receive £3,500. As a result, the total prize funds alone for the CB Awards were just under £60,000. This figure, of course, does not account for the investment the prize made in administrating and marketing the awards, and hosting large award ceremonies.

While Costa did not explicitly state that the reason to end the awards was financial, many speculated that this was the motive for such a sudden and surprising cull of the awards. In their reporting of the cancellation of the award, David Barnett noted that

> Costa – which according to reports of parent company Coca-Cola earlier this year has been enjoying strong sales – said that there are no plans for the awards to be taken over by anyone else (np)

the implication being that it was likely Coca-Cola could in fact afford to continue to run the awards (Barnett). Alternatively, several people commenting about the demise of the award on Twitter suggested other companies who may be interested in taking up sponsorship of the prize,[1] while others questioned how Costa's megabrand parent company could not afford to keep the prizes going.[2] Also, and strikingly, many tweets aligned the ending of the prize with the current cost of living crisis in the UK and the impact this would have on writers.[3]

The fact that the announcement of the termination or threat to other prizes, like the aforementioned Desmond Elliot Prize, *Sunday Times* Short Story Award, and Blue Peter Award, due to

monetary insufficiencies came in quick succession following the CB Award announcement appeared to encourage this reading of the decision to cancel the CB Awards as a financial one ('Desmond Elliott Prize on Hiatus'). And while Costa have remained tight-lipped about the reasons behind their decision, the subsequent discussion generated about how literary prizes can be effectively and sustainably supported demands pause for thought. The response to the end of a series of literary awards, and the concern for the impact this would have on the UK publishing sector, while sometimes hyperbolic, revealed that not only can there be a misunderstanding of how such prizes are managed and financed, but also that the current cultural prize model favoured by major UK prizes does not work. As already discussed, so-called 'major' literary awards (ie those that are long-standing with large prize purses and significant media pull) can not only be an expensive risk for publishers and authors, but prize's that favour the typical typology of (usually) one winner award-giving and headliner corporate sponsorship are also at risk of rebellion by judges who select more than one winner (which can receive negative feedback and cause rifts between judges and prize administrators), as well as the (apparently) sudden withdrawal of financial backing. The issue, therefore, is perhaps less about the loss of a prize, and more about the reliance on the precarious economic and sociocultural power(s) that circulate around these prizes.

ARE NATIONAL AWARDS THE ANSWER?

Responding to the collapse of the CB Awards, the author and former CB Award judge Damian Barr explained how:

> Twitter's most common reaction [to the news of the Awards' cancellation] was: Can another sponsor be found? There is a better question to ask: why do we need sponsors at all? Other countries award national prizes — we do not. It's embarrassing and says a lot about what successive governments think of reading and of writers.

Barr continues, noting how '[s]ponsors come and go', and notes how the Booker, the Samuel Johnson Prize, and the Whitbread prizes were all 'rescued' by new sponsors.[4] However, Barr remains cynical of the longevity of corporate sponsorship, acknowledging that:

> [I]t's great when the aims of sponsors align with the needs of readers and writers but we shouldn't be reliant on the private sector to support and celebrate one of our oldest and most vital creative industries. Publishing is an industry in need of an industrial strategy. It's up to government to provide this. (np)

There is a slight dichotomy in Barr's assertion here. Publishing, like other creative industries in the UK, is considered to be a private sector industry that, while included under the umbrella of the government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), is not a state-owned or -controlled sector. It is somewhat unusual, therefore, to request government intervention to create an 'industrial strategy' for a sector that is privately owned and always has been. This is not to say that other private sectors in the UK have never been state-owned, and there is in fact an increasing demand for many once publicly owned private services to be renationalised, but, as will be discussed presently, the economics of public vs private funding in the UK is problematised by long-standing political divisions and deviations (Elgot and Walker).

Yet, Barr's solution also seems like an obvious and, perhaps, sensible one, especially when we compare the UK to countries that do support what Barr calls 'national prizes'. In Australia, Alex Dane notes, '[e]ach Australian state has a Premier's Award for literature and, since 2008, Australia has also had a Prime Minister's Literary Award' (130). These awards exist with the specific purpose of celebrating writing and publishing from and about their respective states and, Dane argues, such '[p]olitical involvement in literary prizes is a prominent and particular feature of the Australian literary field' (130). Similarly, Canada hosts a series of state-funded and -managed cultural awards. Canada's Governor General's Awards include awards for architecture, performing arts, history, and visual and media arts, but the first award, the Governor General's Literary Awards was originally founded in 1936 (Canada Council for the Arts). The awards have been managed by the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) since 1959. The Governor General's Literary Awards are state-funded – although they have been

co-sponsored by the Bank of Montreal since 1988 (Roberts 22) – and have the deliberate purpose to 'promote Canadian literature and encourage Canadians to read' (Canada Council for the Arts). However, such state sponsorship of awards is inherently complicated by the political context(s) in which they are formed and conferred. As Gillian Roberts has explained in relation to Canada's 'national' awards:

> Literary prizes have come to accrue a particular significance to the constitution of contemporary Canadian literature. Prizes connected to the nation-state (through funding, for example) are most explicitly tied to national projects, and therefore suggest that winning texts, on some level, benefit the nation. (6)

Typically, an artist or author's eligibility for such awards, 'depends upon their Canadian citizenship, in both straightforwardly legal and less specifically cultural terms' (Roberts 10). Such terms of entry are replicated elsewhere. While the Booker is open to an author of any national identity so long as their book has been published in the UK in the preceding year (and if originally published in another country, not more than two years previous), the terms and conditions of the 2021 CB Awards stated that only authors 'whose primary residence (ie [*sic*] resident for over six months of the year) has been in the United Kingdom or Ireland since 1 November 2018' are eligible for the award, although 'UK or Irish nationality is not essential' (Costa Book Awards). Likewise, the JCB Prize for Literature, whose purpose is to 'enhance the prestige and commercial success of contemporary Indian literature', 'create greater prominence for literary writers in Indian cultural and intellectual life', and 'foster translation between Indian languages', uses India's 1955 Citizenship Act as a means of quantifying an author's eligibility, with the prize's 2021 eligibility criteria stating:

> Only works written by Indian citizens, as defined by the Citizenship Act, 1955, are eligible. Proof of nationality will be required with each entry. These restrictions apply only to authors; the nationality of translators, in the case of translated works, is not relevant. (JCB Prize for Literature 6)

Using these formal and government-endorsed terms of criteria to establish a person's status, and therefore eligibility, for a prize takes the definition of citizenship out of the hands of the prize administrators, making it a more prescriptive, as opposed to changeable, attribution of national identity.

Yet, whether state or privately sponsored, the use of awards as a means of supporting and developing literature in specific regions or states, is imbued with complex ideologies pertaining to nationhood and national identity(ies). Such ideologies are inextricable from centuries of cultural, political, social, and economic dominance of the West, which, through colonial rule and cultural ascendency, has come to dictate understandings of cultural and artistic value. And, since cultural awards are working within this context, they often replicate such problematic hierarchies. Writing about the Caine Prize for African Writing, founded in 2000 by the British Liberal Democrat Member of European Parliament Baroness Emma Nicholson in honour of her husband and former chairman of Booker Plc, Sir Michael Caine, Pucherová illustrates the complexities of a prize for African literature which 'is not an African prize, but British, funded mainly by British and some US and African charities' (13). As Pucherová explains:

> Since cultural capital is concentrated in the West, an African writer gains recognition in Africa (and the world) only after gaining foreign credentials [such as the Caine Prize] in the country of the former colonizer. (15)

While Pucherová acknowledges that the Caine Prize

> slowly helped reverse the flow of cultural and material capital away from Africa by providing the winners with a literary legitimation that has secured them local editions of their novels first published in London and New York (22)

as well as facilitating writing workshops for longlisted authors, the prize also contributes to the 'othering' of writers whose eligibility for the prize is identified within the context of a history of colonial rule:

> [T]he prize has (unintentionally) participated in promoting African literature as an exotic commodity and thus contributed to its 'othering' while appropriating it into the Anglo-American cultural capital. … It has tended to reward many diasporic authors whose stories first

> appeared in British and US literary magazines, rather than Africa-based authors, and has relied on UK- and US-based judges, thus continuing the tradition of western criticism of African literature. (22)

Indeed, the Caine Prize is so Anglo-Americanised that it is 'commonly known as the "African Booker"' (Goyal 75) and has 'inherited the positive but also the negative capital of the Booker' (Kiguru, 'Prizing' 168).[5]

Diala has similarly reflected on such issues with regards to the $100,000 Nigeria Prize for Literature, established by Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) in 2004 (36). Despite its 'current relative international anonymity' (60), Diala argues that unlike awards like the Caine Prize, the Nigeria Prize for Literature provides a space for Nigerian authors to identify and express authentic perspectives of African experience(s):

> With Western institutions of interpretation and prize foundations often endorsing their own preferred concepts of artistic excellence in African literature, the Nigeria Prize for Literature offers Nigerian writers and scholars the critical initiative to express an authoritative view on the subject, while crucially incorporating international opinion through its use of external consultants drawn from across Africa and beyond. (60)

Such examples demonstrate how cultural awards, and particularly those that are tied to concepts of national identity(ies), are not only entwined with current statements of how nationhood(s) is defined, but also carry the weight of white European and Anglo-American cultural, political, and economic supremacies that have dominated and dictated understandings of artistic value(s). Therefore, while national identity is an oft used means by which to hone potentially amorphous terms of eligibility, it is a fundamentally prejudicial means of classification.

Some so-called 'national' awards are seemingly starting to dismantle a reliance on an individual's heritage or national identity to ascertain eligibility for a prize. The Griffin Prize for Poetry (founded in 2000), for example, announced in September 2022 that they would remove the category for Canadian poets and would merge the Canadian and international award categories into one (Drudi). It was reported that the decision by the award's founder, philanthropist Scott Griffin, to merge the awards was not only to create one larger award with a significant prize purse (CAD 130,000), but it was also to prevent the separation of entries by national identity (Drudi). Similarly, the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award (EMPA), a prize founded in 2014 for Scottish poets, recently altered the terms of eligibility for the prize to provide a more inclusive definition of 'Scottish' (Edwin Morgan Trust). The EMPA has 'eliminated the criteria of having a Scottish parent and the need to have been continuously resident in Scotland for the past three years' (Edwin Morgan Trust). The prize also subverts the typical winner-takes-all reward process, conferring '£20,000 to the winning poet, £2,500 for runners up and £1,000 for shortlisted poets' (Edwin Morgan Trust). It is perhaps significant that these two awards are privately funded through philanthropy (Griffin) and trusts (EMPA, through the Edwin Morgan Trust), since this likely gives the award organisers more autonomy to disrupt the reliance on national identity as a determining factor of eligibility for an award.

PUBLIC VS PRIVATE: WHO SHOULD FUND AWARDS?

Awards that are state-run also have the complication of having to justify their use of public funds. This is something that has been particularly pertinent in the UK since 2010 and the election of a majority Conservative Party government who have enacted public funding cuts through over a decade of economic austerity.[6] The budget (£341 million) for Arts Council England (ACE), the non-departmental public body of DCMS that provides funding for arts organisations and cultural activities across England, has seen a real terms cut of between 30 and 50 per cent to its budget since 2010 (Higgins). Arts funding in the UK was devolved in 1994: ACE's remit is England, with Creative Scotland (CS) managing public arts funding in Scotland and the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) in Wales. Alternatively, the respective governments in Scotland and Wales have (slightly) increased the budgets for CS and the ACW. CS saw an increase from £60 million in 2021–2022 to £63 million in 2022–2023 (Creative Scotland); and the ACW will see an increase of 1.5

per cent to its budget for 2022–2023 (Arts Council of Wales). There are significant differences in the levels of investment in these nation states and there is a large disparity between ACE, CS, and ACW due to ACE's commitment to fund arts programmes and organisations in London, which reportedly receives a third of all ACE funding annually (this disparity was as high as 82 per cent in 2012–2013) (Redmond). However, what such figures reveal is that the level of public funding made available to the arts in the UK is tied up with the motivations and policies of the political leaders of the time. There is, as Mack argues, a reciprocity to government bodies awarding artistic and cultural achievements. In *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, Mack recounts how, in 1910, Japan's Ministry of Education 'formed a committee for the "protection and cultivation of literature", fearing that Western influence was corrupting it' (187). As Mack explains:

> One of its first (and last) acts was to award Tsubouchi Shōyō a medal and 3,000 yen in prize money for his contributions to literature. … the benefits of the transaction were reciprocal. Not only did the authors selected to serve on the committee gain prestige through this governmental recognition, but the government benefited from association with the cultural capital possessed by those authors. (187)

However, Mack notes that 'The intimate connection with the government, and the tacit support for the government that such a connection would convey, led some literati to refuse the honor' (187). It is therefore not only difficult to disentangle political incentives and strategy from public funding and government involvement in the arts, but authors may view government (and corporate) interventions in the arts as a cynical attempt to boost public support.

Never was this more evident than during the New Labour period of government from 1997 to 2010 in the UK. As Sarah Brouillette argues in *Literature and the Creative Economy*:

> Culture would be central [for New Labour] to negotiating the symbiosis between economic and social goals. The research director of the premier New Labour think tank had written that it was only through culture that a 'visible capitalist social order' would manage to 'organise and sustain itself'. New Labour embraced this maxim to stress the usefulness of culture and the arts to securing individual and collective interests. (3–4)

Consequently, far from stepping away from the neoliberal, market-favouring politics of the outgoing Thatcherite Conservative government, New Labour continued to consider culture and arts in economic terms, valuing and searching for the financial benefits of cultural investment and outputs. It is worth noting that although Brouillette focuses on the UK in her analysis, she argues that these are 'transnational political currents' with 'US-based social science and management thought — at work in British creative-economy discourse' (5). The social science work Brouillette here alludes to being the influential, but problematic, work of Richard Florida who 'argues that the work of the creative class is to render ideas amendable to market circulation' (5–6). This approach to creativity has infiltrated the UK arts sector, with a focus on (economic) growth and return. As a result, it is difficult to see how the current cultural award model could work within the politicised machinations of state-funding in the UK, without risking becoming political projects affected by the whims of incoming and outgoing governments. Even awards that are privately funded are fundamentally political, and in some cases can be dragged into party-political debates.[7] On the founding of the Jhalak Prize for authors of colour in 2017, the white Conservative MP Philip Davis tried to argue that the prize was racist against white people, stating that he did not 'believe that we should have prizes and competitions which discriminate on the basis of race'. Davis took his complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission in January 2017, but the claim was dismissed three months later (Kean, 'Tory'). Jhalak Prize founder, Sunny Singh, stated that she could not

> understand why an MP … would do a thing like this … I am heartbroken because I would expect more responsible behaviour and better use of his time from a member of parliament. (Kean, 'Tory' np)

What this incident proves is that no pockets of cultural achievement and celebration are immune from politically motivated meddling, especially when conservative white-supremacist ideals are at threat.

As a result, despite Barr's explicit call for government intervention to fund and support the UK publishing industry, such interventions are not only

dependent on the political climate of the time, but are also now implicated in the neoliberal marketisation of the arts instilled by both Conservative and Labour governments. This, of course, is no different to how the arts have been marketised in the private sector. As Chin-tao Wu illustrates:

> [t]he harnessing of the power of corporate capital into what had hitherto, at least in Britain, been an almost exclusively public domain was the most intriguing aspect of the new artistic consciousness of the 1980s. (2–3)

This Conservative preference for private funding of the arts made sense. Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Prime Minister in the UK between 1979 and 1990, advocated for the privatisation of state-owned assets and deregulation to enable further market competition. Such principles, when applied to cultural awards, as in this specific case, ensures that private, capital-rich companies can invest economic capital, masked as philanthropy, in order to gain cultural and symbolic capital, which they can then capitalise on in marketing and advertising to win favour with consumers. As Wu explains, '[a]lert to their symbolic standing in people's (consumers') minds, companies utilise the arts, replete with their social implications, as another form of advertising or public-relations strategy' (9).

An excellent example of this in recent years has been the WPF. As I have argued elsewhere (Marsden 2020), the change in headline sponsor from the telecommunications company, Orange, to the alcoholic cream liqueur Baileys in 2013, altered the dynamics of the prize. Not only was this new corporate sponsor criticised by commentators who thought the partnership diminished the reputation of the prize, but it also changed the marketing and (re)presentation of the award which was 'negotiated through what could be read as stereotypically "feminine" imagery that was tied to the brand identity of the sponsor' (Marsden 179). Association with the WPF was therefore a clear marketing opportunity for Baileys, a brand which aims to reach younger female audiences (Adams 2015).

The WPF is a particularly interesting literary award as, since losing Baileys as a headline sponsor in 2017, the prize has attempted to employ new approaches and funding models to sustain the award. On the announcement of the loss of Baileys as lead sponsor, the author and co-founder of the WPF, Kate Mosse, said, 'This is an unparalleled opportunity for a sponsor to champion women's voices … We feel ambitious' (Kean, 'Baileys'). A few months later, it was reported that the new sponsorship model for the prize would see a 'family of sponsors' come together to support the prize (Campbell). This would still include Diageo (the drinks company behind Baileys), with the television production company, Fremantle, and NatWest bank joining this group of sponsors in 2018 (Wood, 'Women's Prize for Fiction'). Soon after this, the WPF would acquire charitable status, making it possible for it to accept donations from the public. This status led to the prize expanding its 'patron scheme' and outreach and development programmes, which is a requisite for charitable status. On the announcement of this new model, the WPF Chair of the Board, Joanna Prior, said:

> We're delighted that we've reached this new stage in the life of the Women's Prize. After twenty-four years of shining the spotlight on remarkable fiction, it is important to create a sustainable and diversified funding model for the prize, which allows individuals to get involved in supporting the Prize alongside our corporate sponsors. ('Women's Prize for Fiction Announces Charitable Status' np)

It is significant that the sustainability and diversity of the award is highlighted here, since it alludes to the need for financial security *and* autonomy, something which awards may not always have with headline corporate sponsorship.

In a profile of the WPF published in August 2022 which reflected on the end of the CB Awards, the director of the Women's Prize Trust (as the organisation is known following its charitable status), Claire Shanahan, said:

> I think a lot of the [ending of prizes] is just coincidence. Of course, the pandemic, inflation and a struggling retail sector all tie into it. But public funders are under more stress than ever and they have, over the last few years, focused on those they have existing relationships with. The commercial sector really needs value as a payback to ensure that any spend is worthwhile. (Tivnan np)

The Trust's commercial director, Harriet Hastings, echoed some of these sentiments, suggesting that

'prizes now have to give value to sponsors rather than it being the case that the model is broken' (Tivnan). There is an irony here. Rather than viewing the demise of the Costas as evidence of the broken awards model, Shanahan suggests that prizes need to keep up with demands or expectations of sponsors to continue to be attractive investments, but the fact that there is such an economic value placed on what an award for the arts can provide a sponsor exposes one of the weaknesses of the current model. Shanahan's comments highlight the dichotomies of the neoliberal marketisation of public vs private capital, demonstrating how both sectors are impacted by economic pressures which make arts funding difficult.

While the WPF appears to have solved their financial precarity with this new model, there are caveats to their situation that give pause for thought when considering how this hybrid funding model might be applied to other awards. Firstly, the WPF's prize fund of £30,000 is 'provided by an anonymous donor in perpetuity' (Campbell). This is not to suggest that there are not significant overheads to running the prize that the organisation does need to find, but large prize purses are one of the most significant – and, as already discussed, insecure and risk-laden – expenses for prizes. Further, these cash prizes cannot be funded using public funding opportunities like those from ACE or CS. Therefore, the WPF is in a somewhat unique position of having a guaranteed prize purse. Secondly, in not entirely abandoning corporate sponsorship, the WPF is able to utilise their sponsors' want, or need, for cultural and symbolic capital, which gives the prize leverage that many other prizes would not have. Two corporate sponsors remain with the WPF (as of 2022): Baileys and Audible (the Amazon-owned audiobook streaming platform). Audible joined the WPF's 'family of sponsors' in 2021 after leaving the *Sunday Times* Short Story Award, which it had sponsored since 2018 ('Desmond Elliott Prize on Hiatus').

A NEW MODEL?

Such movement of sponsors illustrates that even once acquired, corporate sponsorship is not secure, and awards may well be in competition with each other for such opportunities. So much so that even the cessation of an award may be viewed as an opportunity for another prize. Only weeks after the announcement that the CB Awards would come to an end, another prize, the Rathbones Folio Prize, announced it would be expanding its one-winner prize (which was open to fiction, non-fiction, and poetry), into three categories for each eligible form (Shaffi). While it is possible that this decision was made before news of the Costas broke, in their media release, the Rathbones Folio Prize organisers made explicit reference to the end of the CB Awards and the gap this would leave in the literary prize market:

> The prize decided to refresh its format to address the changing landscape of literary prizes, including the recent discontinuation of awards such as the Costa Book Awards, and the impact this has for writers. ('Rathbones Folio Prize Expands' np)

This, somewhat opportunistic, reiteration of the struggles of the literary prize market during an announcement of the expansion of an award demonstrates the extent to which cultural awards are embedded within a neoliberal market which treats the arts, of which awards are a particularly pertinent example given their problematic 'winner takes all' typology, in capitalistic terms. It was a particularly surprising move by the Rathbones Folio Prize, which was founded in 2013 in response to the Booker Prize 'leaning toward popular fiction rather than literary fiction' (Kellogg).

The rapid developments and shifts in the UK literary prize scene following the demise of a long-standing and commercially influential award illustrate how the current literary award model, or what the organisers of the Republic of Consciousness Prize (discussed presently) call the 'traditional literary prize', is failing to provide a sustainable and nonpartisan prize culture that focuses on the support and development of literature. Perhaps, therefore, there should be less focus on saving currently precarious literary prizes (or mourning the already fallen) and more thought about how a new model or typology of prizes may be developed in order to avoid such reliance on capitalist market values. Many awards are privately funded, either through anonymous donors (the Jhalak Prize was funded in this way in its inaugural year) (Onwuemezi 2016) or

the estates of benefactors (such as the EMPA and the Orwell Prizes for political writing) (The Orwell Foundation). A number of literary institutions also provide grants and awards to support writers. The two-hundred-year-old Royal Society of Literature (RSL) claims that 'Through awards and prizes, the RSL invests in authors both established and emerging, at difficult stages of their careers' (The Royal Society of Literature). Similarly, the Society of Authors (SoA) provides over '£100,000 awarded annually for poetry, fiction, non-fiction and illustration'. The Society's awards, which are supported by the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) are said to recognise 'the best and most promising voices of the year' (Society of Authors). Significantly, both of these organisations foreground how their awards aim to provide investment in the potential of new and established authors, as well as provide ongoing support at 'difficult stages'. Such comments allude not only to the creative barriers authors can experience, but also financial: it is well documented that most authors in the UK struggle to earn a living wage from writing alone (Kretschmer et al 1).

Others have sought funding through institutional and industry partnerships. The prize fund for the Republic of Consciousness Prize for Small Presses (henceforth RoC Prize), for example, comes from the University of East Anglia and The Granta Trust. The RoC Prize is also an interesting example of an award that subverts the typical typology of cultural awards. Established in 2017, the RoC Prize 'rewards the best fiction by small presses publishing 12 or fewer titles a year and are wholly independent of any other commercial financial entity' ('Republic of Consciousness Prize'). As the prize's website explains:

> The Republic of Consciousness Prize for Small Presses has never operated like a traditional literary prize, which invariably awards money to the writer of the winning work, which they are free to spend as they wish. … From Year 1 we have made it explicit that the prize is for publishers, and that we aim to share the prize money across more than one press and that the money awarded is to be used to support a difficult financial decision … which in turns further supports the production of literature of high merit. ('Our Purpose' np)

This subversion of the 'traditional literary prize' provides some indication into how a new model for literary prizes might work, with a foregrounding of the sharing of prize money and recognition of the work of the production processes of books, as well as providing promotion for the book and author. Sharing prize funds amongst winners and/or shortlists disrupts the hierarchical structure of prizes and the exclusionary winner-takes-all principle of cultural awards.

Some authors have also taken it upon themselves to sabotage the sole winner-takes-all model. In 2015, the Zambian author Namwali Serpell split the £10,000 Caine Prize she was awarded with her fellow shortlistees as 'an act of mutiny', stating she wanted to 'change the structure of the prize' (BBC, 'Zambian Writer'). More recently still, in 2019, Olivia Laing split the £10,000 James Tait Black award with the three other authors shortlisted for the prize. Laing noted that in her debut novel *Crudo*, for which she won the James Tait Black prize, she had made the point 'that competition has no place in art' (Flood, 'Olivia Laing' np).

While it may be that there is still room for competition in art, since selections and preferences according to taste and purpose are inextricable from the creation and circulation of art, it is perhaps the politicisation and subsequent marketisation of competition in art that is the problem, and literary awards have become key symbols and facilitators of this. The sudden disappearance of the CB Awards, and the ripples it caused in the UK publishing industry, indicates that the current or 'traditional' literary prize model is always at risk of destabilisation according to the penchants and demands of a private economic market that is rarely in favour of supporting writers and authors, but is instead concerned with the social and symbolic capital return it could receive. Resolving this, as has been suggested, with government interventions that would provide state-funded support to prizes is not necessarily a viable alternative, as state intervention is often complicated by how eligibility is characterised and defined in nationalistic terms. As a result, state-funded prizes often become conduits to preserve and promote particular ideologies pertaining to nationhood and national culture(s) which can have roots in the exclusion and marginalisation of some identities and cultures over others. Accordingly, the subversions to the traditional literary prize model discussed herewith – prize funds being split or shared between winners and shortlistees, awards and grants

being viewed as contributions to support and development for writers, and alternative funding models which do not rely on sizeable investment from one headline sponsor – may provide the alternative approaches needed to make the literary awards market more sustainable. Therefore, rather than see the cessation of the Costa Book Awards as a loss to publishing, perhaps we should see it as an opportunity to reassess and rethink literary award models in order to create something more sustainable and equitable for the industry.

NOTES

[1] See, for example: @DannyVanBooks, 'Terrible news … but now thinking @YorkshireTea #BookAwards has lovely ring to it … guys?? Tea and books are perfect companions!' *Twitter*, 10 June 2022, 2:19 pm, twitter.com/DannyVanBooks/status/1535250198842195968; @NeilDenham1978, 'Booo to @CostaCoffee! Come on @_CaffeNero_ this is your moment … Costa book awards scrapped suddenly after 50 years.' *Twitter*, 11 June 2022, 8:41 am, twitter.com/NeilDenham1978/status/1535527588810072066.

[2] @LittleToller, 'Gosh this is terrible news. My only conclusion is this is a cost cutting exercise surely another sponsor could have been found … ' *Twitter*, 10 June 2022, 12:22 pm, twitter.com/LittleToller/status/1535220876005806083.

[3] @TheSallyGardner, 'Costa book awards scrapped suddenly after 50 years. Such sad news. I was proud to have won a Costa Award. Feel this is a terrible loss, At such difficult times for writers.' *Twitter*, 11 June 2022, 7:37 am, twitter.com/TheSallyGardner/status/1535511401342574595; @NovelFinds, 'What — just like that! Have you sought another sponsor? In these terrible times, good books are more vital than ever.' *Twitter*, 11 June 2022, 7:26 am, twitter.com/NovelFinds/status/1535508647417102336.

[4] This is slightly misleading, since although Costa Coffee took over the sponsorship of the Whitbread Book Awards, Costa Coffee is in fact a subsidiary of Whitbread PLC, and so this is not necessarily evidence of a sponsor takeover but a rebranding of the awards.

[5] Also see 'Literary Prizes, Writers' Organisations and Canon Formation in Africa' for more on the Caine Prize and its role in productions of value(s) and canonisation in African Literature. (Kiguru, 'Literary Prizes').

[6] For more, see: Benjamin Mueller, 'What is Austerity and How Has It Affected British Society?' *New York Times*, 24 Feb. 2019, nytimes.com/2019/02/24/world/europe/britain-austerity-may-budget.html. Accessed 29 Sept. 2022; Polly Toynbee and David Walker, 'The Lost Decade: The Hidden Story of How Austerity Broke Britain.' *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 2020, theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/03/lost-decade-hidden-story-how-austerity-broke-britain. Accessed 29 Sept. 2022; Krishnah Poinasamy, *The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality* (Oxfam International, 2013). Available at: cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en_0.pdf. Accessed 29 Sept. 2022.

[7] For more on the influences of contemporary and historical politics on prize culture, see: Dessa Bayrock and Sarah Brouillette, 'Who Wins? The Politics of Prize Culture in Canada's CODE Burt Awards.' *Wasafiri*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2022, pp. 86–94, doi: 10.1080/02690055.2022.1999686; Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China's Quest for a Nobel Prize in Literature* (U of Hawai'i P, 2006); Luke Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Brill, 2002).

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