

# Eligibility, Access and the Laws of Literary Prizes

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**T**HE ABILITY OF LITERARY PRIZES TO SWAY LITERARY TASTES AND SHAPE CULTURAL discourse has long been explored through the decisions made by the prize judging panel. The jury of experts, who bring with them symbolic capital and are often regarded as representing a nation's sophisticated literary palate, have been the subject of extensive scholarship. However, there is a selection process that occurs prior to the commencement of the official or public adjudication. The entry guidelines for individual literary prizes ensure that particular authors and titles will not, or cannot, be considered for the prize and are, therefore, excluded from the symbolic and economic rewards that come with being shortlisted for and winning a literary prize. How do literary prize eligibility requirements limit access to the prestige and promotion that comes with a literary prize? How does the issue of exclusivity influence the ways prizes run, the winners that are chosen and, ultimately, the field-wide conceptions of prize-winning writing?

The scholarly investigations into literary prizes in the contemporary publishing field commonly cite the consecratory function that prizes play and the exchange of symbolic and economic capital that is essential to their existence (see, for example, Driscoll; de Nooy; English; Norris; Squires). Beth Driscoll observes that 'consecration has always been a function of cultural awards', and 'prizes declare themselves sober consecrators of genius, ignoring the market-driven successes...

to honour outstanding works of literature' (Driscoll 119-20). Claire Squires similarly acknowledges the role of prizes in contemporary book culture, noting the importance that the publishing industry places on accumulated prestige, and the relationship between what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic and economic capital (Squires, 'Literary Prizes and Awards' 20; Bourdieu, 'Forms of Capital' 244). While the importance of the literary or cultural prize is not new to the contemporary field—James English (50) attributes the role that prizes play in contemporary cultural discourse to the introduction of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1895—the proliferation of prizes throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century has resulted in a cultural industry where prizes make significant contributions to literary tastemaking and national canon formation.

This influence can be seen in the way that, especially where the major literary prizes are concerned, the label of 'prize winner' is often permanently attached to prize-winning authors and their subsequent writerly activities. A good example of this can be seen with Richard Flanagan's novel *First Person* (2017, Penguin Random House), where the phrase 'Winner of the Man Booker Prize 2014' clearly adorns the cover. This statement appears to indicate that *First Person* won the 2014 Booker Prize. This is not, however, the case. Richard Flanagan won the 2014 Booker Prize for *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013, Penguin Random House) but the label of 'prize winner' is now attached to all Flanagan's work. The use of the prize-winner label by publishers in this fashion supports Claire Squires' observation that the literary prize operates as 'a shorthand for literary merit' (*Marketing Literature* 291), drawing an explicit connection between the symbolic capital exchange between the institution of the Booker Prize and Richard Flanagan, a connection that helps to signal to readers that *First Person* is worthy of their consideration.

A prize's authority to operate as this 'shorthand' is based upon a collectively agreed upon system of prestige and reputation building that has defined literary activity for over a century. Bourdieu's articulation of the structure of the field of cultural production notes that actions taken by agents within the field not only establish the structure of the field but also belief in the structure and systems of structural mobility (*Field of Cultural Production* 78, 83). Reading literary prize culture through the lens of Bourdieu's field of cultural production, one can observe the ways in which the power and influence of the literary prize within the field of cultural production is established by publishers, critics, booksellers and authors who, through their actions, express a belief in this influence. Many scholars of literary prize culture explore the self-fulfilling nature of the influence of literary prizes. James English's research into cultural prizes engages explicitly with the beliefs that underpin this system, beliefs that are dependent on slippery notions of aesthetic value and definitions of art (52-3). English notes that the 'collective belief' in the 'cultural value' of prizes is primarily dependent on the fact that actors

in the literary field have *decided* to believe in them (127), and that this belief is dependent on the regularity of events—such as the annual awarding of a prize—that have the express purpose of reinforcing the ideological underpinning of said belief (53). Wouter de Nooy similarly observes the basis of the prize’s influence over tastemaking in the literary field, writing: ‘The prestige of a prize is equivalent to the importance that members of the literary field attach to it’ (‘Gentlemen of the Jury’ 535). And, particularly where the major awards for literary fiction are concerned, the power that the publishing industry—and associated intermediaries—have vested in literary prizes ensures their continued relevance and influence over authors’ careers.

Where the authority of prizes as a consecratory institution appears to remain largely unquestioned—Emmett Stinson observes that ‘for better or worse, prizes are one of the chief mechanisms by which the literary field establishes notions of literary value’ (‘Small Publishers and the Miles Franklin Award’ 140)—within the structure of the field the competition between the various literary prizes in a given field to be *the* definer of literary merit is fierce. Beth Driscoll notes that in a crowded field such as Australia’s, the various literary awards ‘compete to monopolize the power of consecration’ (*New Literary Middlebrow* 121). English’s, de Nooy’s and Driscoll’s explorations of the ‘belief’ and the ‘competition’ that underpin literary prize culture suggest that the continued relevance of an individual literary prize within a national or international literary field depends upon the ability for that prize to define notions of aesthetic value which is, in turn, based on the industry’s and reading public’s belief in their ability and authority to do so. The eligibility guidelines and prize rules that govern the way each prize is adjudicated play a significant role in how the winner is chosen. I argue that these guidelines are a way of providing structure and parameters to the potentially formless systems that are tasked with contributing to an author’s prestige and literary reputation, while at the same time ensuring that the quintessentially conservative nature of literary prize giving remains unchallenged.

Literary prize eligibility guidelines or entry requirements work in both explicit and tacit ways to restrict the texts and the authors who can be considered for an award. The explicit purpose of these rules is pragmatic and prize administrators establish parameters in order to ensure that prize judges are only considering the titles that align with the mission of the prize. These restrictions can be drawn around genres, formats and author identity and, in a field where the number of prizes continues to grow, eligibility requirements appear to be increasingly niche. Eligibility requirements, entry fees and stipulated restrictions help to ensure the effective administration and continued existence of the prize. For prizes that seek to celebrate authors from traditionally marginalised groups—such as the Stella Prize, the Women’s Prize for Fiction, the Lambda Literary Award or the Liminal Fiction Prize—who is and who is not eligible to enter and win the award is

foundational, and the rules that stipulate eligibility are essential to their purpose. In addition to the explicit and pragmatic effects of literary prize eligibility restrictions, the rules that help to ensure that the mission of the prize is fulfilled in a meaningful and timely way can also have more tacit implications. When literary prizes restrict entries to citizens of a particular country, exclude texts that have only had 'internet publication' (Miles Franklin Literary Award Guidelines' np) or ensure that entry fees are beyond the reach of particular publishers and authors, the implicit effect of this exclusion is often to support the celebration of particular kinds of writing, by particular kinds of authors, published by particular kinds of publishers. In this way, the rules that govern prize eligibility help to preserve a top-down approach to circulation of literary texts.

Where scholars such as Patrick Allington ('What is Australia Anyway?') and Julianne Lamond ('Stella vs Miles') have interrogated the way that the entry requirements for Australia's Miles Franklin Literary Award promote a certain kind of narrative with the stipulation that the prize is awarded to an Australian author who represents 'Australian life in any of its phases' (Miles Franklin Literary Award Guidelines' np) beyond this, little scholarly attention has been paid to the hard and fast rules that govern the prizes and determine which titles and authors are eligible for consideration by the judges. In her exploration of book prize culture, Claire Squires observes that, among other things, literary prize eligibility requirements help to construct notions of literary value and 'create communities of writers and develop communities of readers' ('Literary Prizes and Awards'). This can be seen in the different declarations of purpose from various awards, and the long list of rules that determine who is in and who is out of the running. Words like 'honour', 'celebrate', 'literary', 'best', 'merit' and 'distinguished' are consistently used on the part of literary prizes when describing their award and the writing they seek to promote. That almost all literary prizes use these descriptive terms highlights the competition between the various literary prizes and their struggle to become, as described by Driscoll (*New Literary Middlebrow* 121), the sole arbiter of literary taste. Moreover, these declarations of purpose serve to demonstrate just how subjective the assessment and adjudication of literary quality is and how the rules and eligibility guidelines make an attempt to put in place parameters for those who are tasked with picking a winner.

This essay examines the eligibility requirements and rules that govern a small sample of literary prizes in Australia and the United Kingdom with the aim of understanding how these rules and requirements influence equality of access to these essential sites of tastemaking. While the sample of prizes selected for analysis is in no way exhaustive, it does include Australian and international prizes, prizes for literary fiction and non-fiction. While each award may differ slightly in their aims, motivations and considerations, all the awards in the sample—and, I argue, all awards more broadly—aim to identify and promote

notions of literary excellence. To understand the radiating effects of literary prize eligibility requirements, I conducted a discourse analysis of the press releases, websites and publicly available statement of terms or rules for the following prizes: the Booker Prize, the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the Stella Prize and the Women's Prize for Fiction. By examining the ways in which the prizes describe themselves, describe their shortlisted and winning authors, and describe the ways in which authors, titles and publishers are included and excluded from the prize uncovers the elusive and indirect effects of literary prizes within the Anglophone literary field.

### **The Self-proclaimed Value of the Literary Prize**

The mission statement or stated purpose for each award is a helpful entry point for understating the values for which each literary prize stands. These mission statements are often prominently displayed in the prize's marketing collateral and entry guidelines, and are regularly referred to in the media and at public events where shortlists and winners are announced. Each prize differs in their stated purpose but celebrating literary achievement and identifying literary quality are the two factors that are consistent aims among the prizes in this sample. James English (*The Economy of Prestige* 51-3) explores the institutional function of the contemporary cultural prize, observing that the prize seeks to exercise control 'over what may be recognized as worthy of special notice'. The values that each prize seeks to celebrate are explicitly linked to the function of control to which English is referring and the success of this aim is dependent upon the perception and positionality of the prize within the broader publishing industry. While some may dispute the ability of the various literary prizes to fulfil these missions, it is difficult to overlook the influence that these statements have in the literary field. These proclamations and mission statements help to establish and cement the belief in the role of prizes as consecratory institutions and the eligibility requirements of the different literary prizes, in a number of cases, only serve to ensure that particular titles and authors are prize winners. When, for example, the Booker Prize states that they award the prize to the best eligible novel, this statement both contributes to the prize's claim to their authority to define notions of literary merit around which the field can coalesce, and identifies the authors who fit within these parameters and who are, therefore, worthy of celebration.

The Booker Prize describes itself as 'the leading literary award in the English speaking world' and proclaims that the prize is 'awarded to what is, in the opinion of the judges, the best novel of the year written in English' ('Booker Prize' 2). The veracity of this statement, and the role the Booker plays within contemporary Anglophone literary culture, is supported by the ways in which the publishing industry and the reading public react to the actions of prize administrators and judges, most notably in relation to press coverage and book sales (Kean; Morris).

Being the 'leading literary award' is central to the identity of the Booker Prize, an identity that can only be sustained because publishers, critics, authors and readers have an interest in believing it is so (Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production* 78; English 51). On a smaller scale, the Miles Franklin Literary Award, Australia's 'most prestigious' literary prize (Convery; Steger, 'Trauma and Humour'), operates in a similar way to the Booker Prize in so far as the Miles' self-proclaimed prestige is underpinned by the significant media attention the longlist, shortlist and winner announcements attract (Stinson, 'And the Winner Isn't') and an increase in book sales for the shortlisted and winning titles (Delaney; Morris). In her will, Stella Miles Franklin set out the guidelines for which her bequest would be awarded: '[the] prize shall be awarded for the Novel for the year which is of the highest literary merit and which must present Australian Life in any of its phases' (Miles Franklin Literary Award). Media coverage of the prize in Australia's major newspapers over the past 30 years echoes this language, continually referring to the prestigious nature of the prize and the 'literary merit' of the winners (Cosar; Romei; Steger, 'Big-Guns Shortlisted'). The definitive identification with prestige, merit and leadership that these two prizes make—together with the actions taken by agents within the literary field in response to this identification—means that the restrictions that they place around the authors and texts that are included and excluded for consideration have far-reaching effects. If these prizes are among the publishing industry's arbiters of literary taste, who they consider and who they exclude is significant (Sapiro 10; Stinson, 'Small Publishers, Symbolic Capital and Australian Literary Prizes' 211).

While all literary prizes cling to notions of prestige and aims of identifying the best books and rewarding literary achievement, prizes that seek to celebrate authors who have traditionally been marginalised from the literary field have a more complex relationship to these notions of prestige. The existence of the Stella Prize for Women's Writing in Australia and the Women's Prize for Fiction in the UK is an express acknowledgement of the power and influence of literary prizes within and beyond the literary field, and these prizes have been established to address an inequality in the way this power is distributed (Stella Prize; Women's Prize for Fiction). Moreover, their success in addressing this inequality is dependent upon their ability to be seen as equally influential as prizes like the Booker or the Miles Franklin. Closely guarded eligibility guidelines and entry requirements are the foundational principle of prizes that seek to address structural inequalities in the literary field. The Stella Prize is open to women and non-binary authors; the Women's Prize for Fiction is only open to women authors. Prizes like the Women's Prize and the Stella, along with a whole host of prizes with similar objectives, allow us to see the ways in which restrictions on who can and cannot enter an award shape notions of taste within the literary field. Thomas Crisp (Crisp 95) explores this in relation to the Lambda Literary Award that is awarded to an LGBTQ author for LGBTQ young adult fiction, noting that while eligibility criteria of this nature

are often criticised by those excluded from the award, this ‘strategic essentialism’ is employed to ‘displace a hegemonic majority’. This desire for displacement is evident in the marketing collateral for both the Women’s Prize and the Stella Prize: both prizes cite the male-dominated literary prize shortlists as primary motivations for the establishment of the awards. In this way it becomes clear how eligibility guidelines that stipulate who can and cannot enter and win an award are consciously and explicitly employed in order to influence critical reception in the literary field. There are, however, less explicit, more sub-conscious ways in which the rules that govern the administration of literary prizes influence the production of taste in contemporary book publishing culture.

### **Pay to Play: Entry and Marketing Fees**

The costs associated with entering a literary prize can influence the titles that are submitted to a prize for consideration. Entry fees, contributions to literary prize marketing activities, and the cost of providing multiple copies of a title for judging all place a financial burden onto publishers and, in some instances, influence decisions to submit titles for consideration. Emmett Stinson’s research into the relationship between small and independent publishers and the cost of entering the Miles Franklin Literary Award observes that the \$75 entry fee can act as a barrier to access for small publishers. Stinson notes, ‘These fees, taken in aggregate, can discourage submissions from publishers who lack capital reserves. The result is that, while small publishers may produce the majority of Australian literary works, it does not follow that they comprise the majority of entrants to the Miles Franklin Award’ (‘Small Publishers and the Miles Franklin Award’ 143). It is not just the Miles Franklin that charges an entry fee for each title submitted to the prize. It is commonplace for literary prizes in Australia to charge an entry fee of between \$70 and \$100 per title. And while these fees are essential for the continued existence of the literary prize, they can, as Stinson observes, discourage publishers working in strained financial environments to put titles forward. The result of this caution is an over-representation of titles published by conglomerate and larger independent publishers entering the field as prize winners every year, and an under-representation of titles published by smaller independent publishers, that is, the houses that are publishing the greatest proportion of literary fiction in the Australian publishing sector (Stinson, ‘Small Publishers and the Emerging Network’ 29).

Charging an entry fee is not the only method that prizes use to support the costs associated with prize administration. It is increasingly common, both in Australia and the UK, for prizes to charge publishers a fee for marketing and promotion if their title is longlisted, shortlisted or both. In addition to the Stella Prizes entry fee of between \$60 and \$80, if a publisher’s title is shortlisted for the award they are required to pay an additional supplementary marketing fee of \$500 (Stella,

'Eligibility Guidelines'). This kind of fee structure is more commonly seen among the UK's major literary awards. For example, the publishers of titles shortlisted for the Booker Prize are required to contribute £5000 to the prize's marketing costs, and the publisher of the winning title is required to pay an additional £5000: a £10,000 fee for winning the 'leading literary award in the English speaking world' (Booker Prize 4). It has been argued by the administrators of prizes such as the Booker that this 'should... be offset by increases in sales' of the shortlisted title, however, this recuperation is not guaranteed and is not, especially for titles shortlisted for major awards like the Booker, the only associated marketing cost that a publisher is likely to incur as a result of their title being shortlisted: 'it is possible that the costs exceed the financial benefit', one publisher told Danuta Kean at *The Guardian* ('On the Eve of Costa Awards'). Again, we can see the ways that the costs associated with entering literary prizes can work as a barrier to entry for some publishers.

The Women's Prize for Fiction in the UK garnered attention in September 2018 when they announced that, in addition to the £5000 marketing fee publishers were to be charged if their title was shortlisted, publishers would be required to front up an additional £1000 if their titles were longlisted, which is a £6000 commitment for the publisher of just one of the shortlisted titles, a financial commitment beyond the reach of many publishers (Women's Prize for Fiction). And while the additional fee was introduced to address the costs of running the award brought about by a change to the Prize's sponsorship structure (Cowdrey), issues around the accessibility of literary prizes like the Women's Prize, especially where small and independent publishers are concerned, call into question the ability for prizes to successfully fulfill their role as consecratory and tastemaking institutions. If only the larger and more financially able publishers are able to compete in the literary prize arena, questions surface around what titles and which authors are being overlooked and whether prizes like the Women's Prize can confidently claim to 'celebrate the very best full length fiction written by a woman' (Women's Prize for Fiction). In response to this announcement, UK independent publisher Galley Beggar Press noted on Twitter that this change is 'Catastrophic for small publishers. £1000 isn't small change to us (Our author won this prize a few years ago when we were even smaller. It would have been near impossible to enter with these rules' (Galley Beggar Press). What happens when a small independent press with a longlisted title does not have the resources to pay these marketing fees? Is their title removed from consideration for the shortlist? Should they avoid entering the award all together? In response to a series of tweets by Galley Beggar Press and other UK independent publishers, the Women's Prize for Fiction said that if small independent presses could not afford the marketing contribution, they could get in touch with the prize to make alternative arrangements. The Prize didn't elaborate upon what these arrangements might be, however, the introduction of this policy nonetheless suggests that the Women's



Prize for Fiction is more accessible for larger and more financially robust publishers, influencing the relationship between the publisher of a title and that title's likelihood of being shortlisted for or winning a literary prize.

### **Excluding Self-Published Titles**

The entry requirements or restrictions for many literary awards stipulate that self-published titles are ineligible. The Miles Franklin Literary Award's, the Stella Prize's, the Women's Prize for Fiction's and the Booker Prize's eligibility rules explicitly exclude self-published titles (Booker Prize 3; Miles Franklin Literary Award; Stella Prize; Women's Prize for Fiction). Different awards have different approaches to excluding self-published titles, some more definitive than others, most commonly prizes stipulate that each title must be submitted by its publisher, not the author, thereby effectively excluding self-published titles. The Miles Franklin and the Stella Prize both take a succinct approach, stating that 'self-published works are ineligible' (Miles Franklin Literary Award), and that 'self-published books and books published in ebook form are ineligible for entry' (Stella Prize). In the UK, the Booker Prize take a more verbose approach to this exclusion: analysis of the Booker entry guidelines suggests a level of caution around self-published titles being entered into the award. The prize administrators appear to be at pains to cover all bases so that only titles published by a publisher—and published under the traditional commercial arrangements offered by publishers—are eligible. Booker Prize rules state:

Self-published works are not eligible where the author is the publisher. If the publisher is a company which has been specifically set up to publish the work in question, and/or the author is the person who owns the majority shareholding or otherwise controls the company, the work is ineligible. Works which have been published via a commercial arrangement through which the publisher is paid by the author are not eligible. Where an author or his/her agent require submission as a condition of a work's publishing contract that work will not be eligible. (Booker Prize 3)

This statement speaks directly to the understanding that publishing houses have traditionally acted in both a quality assurance role and value adding role. Moreover, the 'cover all bases' nature of the Booker's statement on self-published novels perhaps suggests a level of fear around authors operating outside legacy structures. In their research into perceptions of symbolic capital and self-published authors, Thomlison and Bélanger identify a 'prestige gap' that continues to exist between self-published and traditionally published authors, and suggest that titles that are only published in e-book format lack the ability to amass a 'display value' inherent in the publication of print titles (Thomlison and Bélanger

311, 312). Viewing the perceptions of prestige and quality through the lens of Bourdieu's articulation of the ways in which the field produces 'belief' in the symbolic capital of particular institutions and practices, we can see the judgements revealed in Thomlison and Bélanger's study and the ways in which major literary prizes exclude self-published titles as part of the same impressionistic spectrum. The way in which prizes so definitively exclude self-published titles helps to reinforce the broader prestige gap associated with self-publishing practice.

As noted earlier in this essay, these stipulations operate on an important functional level to limit the number of titles that judges and administrators are required to read. However, the blanket exclusion of self-published titles among so many of the highest literary honours in both Australia and the UK also speaks to the 'values' or 'virtues' that prizes see themselves as tasked with upholding, again reinforcing not only the field-wide belief in their function, but also the field-wide perception among readers and cultural intermediaries around contemporary self-published titles. Prizes like the Booker Prize and the Miles Franklin Literary Award help to maintain a gap in the perception of books published by a publisher and authors that decide to go it alone, based upon the prizes' unchallenged assumptions that these titles will waste the time of the judges and administrators by not meeting the standard of the award. The exclusion of self-published titles is an expression of the way that prizes seek to, and in many ways are successful in, perpetuating conservative understandings of quality and validity that permeate the literary field. The perception of self-published titles as 'less literary' or otherwise having a lower standard than titles published through a traditional industry pathway is one that is outdated and does not necessarily comport with the changing practice of the contemporary publishing industry. Titles like Sergio De La Pava's *A Naked Singularity*, Paul Kingsnorth's *The Wake* and Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* are three examples of self-published titles that are problematising long-standing attitudes around self-publishing and contemporary publishing practice.

### **Playing Favourites: The Booker Prize**

The Booker Prize has, perhaps, the most brazenly conservative eligibility guidelines for entering the award. What becomes clear from reading the detailed rules and regulations that govern who is eligible for the Booker Prize is that protecting the 'brand' of the prize and the perception of what kinds of titles become Booker Prize winning novels are important to the institution of the Booker Prize, and these considerations sit at the forefront of their rigid approach to gatekeeping. This is evident in the complex and somewhat confusing restrictions that stipulate the number of titles that each individual publisher is eligible to enter into the award (Marsden). And while these regulations do seek to limit the number of titles that the judges are required to assess, the approach that

the Booker Prize takes is *particularly* conservative, in that it establishes favorable conditions to publishers who have been successful in the past, and illuminates the role that publishers play in the inclusion and exclusion of particular groups when it comes to the awarding of literary prizes.

The Booker Prize's eligibility requirements state that a publisher can submit one title for consideration if they have not had a title longlisted for the prize in the last five years; a publisher can submit two titles for consideration if they have had one or two titles longlisted in the last five years; a publisher can submit three titles for consideration if they have had three or four titles longlisted in the past five years; and, if a publisher has had more than five titles longlisted in the past five years, they can submit up to four titles. In addition to this, if an author has ever been shortlisted for the prize, their latest title may be put forward for the prize *in addition* to their publisher's quota. These rules not only ensure that publishers—and their imprints—who have had success with the Booker Prize in the past are given more opportunities for future success, they also force publishers to select which titles and which authors from their fiction frontlist are going to be in the running. Both of these factors have an extraordinary influence on Anglophone literary prize culture, the shaping of literary tastes, and the position of literary power and influence.

From 1969 to 2018, 60 individual publishers had titles shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Just eight publishing houses account for more than half of the 277 shortlisted titles in this period. These publishers are Jonathan Cape, Faber & Faber, Hamish Hamilton, Chatto & Windus, Picador, Viking, Bloomsbury, and Secker & Warburg; five of these houses are imprints of Penguin Random House. The fact that only thirteen percent of publishers have published more than fifty percent of the shortlisted titles demonstrates the conservative effect that the Booker Prize eligibility requirements have on the diversity of shortlisted works. This system gives rise to a self-perpetuating cycle: these eight publishers published more than half of the 53 winning titles from 1969-2018, suggesting that the eligibility system set up for the Booker Prize does favour those who have been successful in the past, again making the old and rigid hierarchies of the literary field difficult to transform. Of the 30 Booker Prize winning titles published by these eight publishers, just eight (twenty-seven percent) were written by women.

The system adopted by the Booker Prize has potentially problematic outcomes at both ends of the process and places pressure on publishers to select the titles that they want to put forward from the list of authors they published in the previous year. And if they have just one title that, according to the prize's submission guidelines, they are eligible to submit, which one are they going to select? How might the publishers select the one title among those in their frontlist? What might govern their decision-making strategy? Winning the Booker Prize can have

significant financial benefits for a publisher (Squires, 'Book Marketing'; Kean) and decisions around which titles are put forward for major awards like the Booker are not taken lightly (Jordison). Looking at the history of the award could help a publisher to make their selection: in the history of the Man Booker Prize, 31 men and 16 women have won; just nine authors of colour have won the prize since it was first awarded in 1969. If you were a publisher playing the odds with one title, would you put forward your white male author? History would suggest that they were more likely to win than, say, a woman of colour. The preference that this eligibility structure has established for those publishers that have been successful in the past indicates a conservative literary disposition on the part of the Booker Prize administrators, and a desire to ensure things stay the same. By establishing a system wherein disproportionate access is granted to major publishing conglomerates, the conservative literary disposition inherent in the administration of the Booker Prize in turn influences the production and circulation of literary texts.

## **Conclusion**

This essay seeks to highlight just one part of the process for selecting a literary prize winner and the ways in which this contributes to the inherently conservative nature of the way authors and titles are judged in the pursuit of both economic and symbolic rewards. It is a process that is often overlooked in the scholarly interrogations of the power that literary prizes exert in the contemporary literary field, however, the rules that stipulate which titles and which authors are eligible for a major literary award not only shape but also reflect the rigid ideas around literary merit that have long plagued consecratory institutions, and help to maintain the status quo. There is one genre of eligibility and exclusivity that is explicitly enacted to address inequalities that exist in contemporary literary tastemaking institutions. The 'strategic essentialism' of literary prizes such as the Women's Prize for Fiction and the Stella Prize seek to celebrate the writing of women and non-binary authors, and are among a growing collection of prizes that *use* the eligibility guidelines of literary prizes to transform long-standing structures of power in the literary field. Prizes of this nature illuminate the ways in which the tacit and explicit exclusivity of literary prizes influence field-wide perceptions and the production of literary tastes.

Restrictions and exclusivity are woven into the fabric of the institution of the literary prize and for many authors or publishers access to the prize, just to be considered by the judging panel, remains out of reach. The laws that govern eligibility of certain texts and certain authors for particular prizes serve to establish a particular kind of literary power and prestige in the publishing field. Entry fees, the exclusion of self-published titles and complex rules that favour

legacy publishers make it difficult to transform or evolve field-wide perceptions or beliefs around what has literary value.

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