

Fiction has a unique capacity to bring difficult issues to a broad readership on a personal level, creating empathy in a reader's heart for the theoretical stranger. Its capacity for invoking moral and social responsibility is enormous. Throughout history, every movement toward a more peaceful and humane world has begun with those who imagined the possibilities.

The Bellwether Prize seeks to support the imagination of humane possibilities.

The Bellwether Prize for Fiction, awarded biennially, consists of a \$25,000 cash payment to the author of the winning manuscript, and guaranteed publication by a major publisher. The author will collect royalties in accordance with a publisher's contract.

The Bellwether Prize is unique; no other major North American endowment or prize for the arts specifically seeks to support a literature of social responsibility. Its intent is to advocate serious literary fiction that addresses issues of social justice and the impact of culture and politics on human relationships. The Prize is awarded to a previously unpublished novel representing excellence in this genre.

bellwetherprize.org

B

**The Bellwether
Prize**
for Fiction

2009-2010

*In Support
of A Literature
of Social Change*

Established by
Barbara Kingsolver

How to Submit Your Manuscript

Submissions must be postmarked between September 1 and October 2, 2009. Applicants for the Bellwether Prize must be U.S. citizens who have some previous publication record but who have not previously published a book that sold more than 10,000 copies. Your manuscript must be an original, previously unpublished novel at least 80,000 words in length. *All submissions must be accompanied by an application form and \$25 processing fee.*

For guidelines and an application form, see: www.bellwetherprize.org, or send SASE to National Writers United Service Organization, Bellwether Prize, 256 W. 38th Street, Suite 703, New York, New York, 10018.

Judging and Publication

Manuscripts are judged blind (without authors' names) by a panel of distinguished literary authors whose work exemplifies the category of fiction endorsed by the Bellwether

Prize. The winner will be announced in May 2010, with publication to follow promptly. The winning author will enter into a contract with the participating publisher, with a first hardcover printing of at least 10,000 copies.

Defining a literature of social change

Qualifying manuscripts must show outstanding literary merit and, in content, address contemporary or historical issues in a manner that advocates social responsibility. Fiction of this type is greatly valued by readers throughout the world; the Nobel Prize for literature has frequently celebrated this tradition in the works of such writers as Nadine Gordimer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Miguel Asturias, George Bernard Shaw, Thomas Mann, Wole Soyinka, and John Steinbeck.

"Socially responsible literature," for the purposes of this award, may describe categorical human transgressions in a way that compels readers to examine their own prejudices. It may invoke the necessity for economic and social justice for a particular ethnic or social group, or it may explicitly examine movements that have brought positive social change. Or, it may define accountable relationships between people and their environment. "Social responsibility" describes a moral obligation of individuals to engage with their

communities in ways that promote a more respectful coexistence.

Clear, analytical and literary accounts of political and social injustice (either current or historical) include the following examples: *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison; *Snow Falling on Cedars*, David Guterson; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee; *Crows Over a Wheatfield*, Paula Sharp; *Ragtime*, E.L. Doctorow; *The Women's Room*, Marilyn French; *Memoirs of An Ex-Prom Queen*, Alix Kates Shulman; *Mean Spirit*, Linda Hogan; *The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver; *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker; and *The Milagro Beanfield War*, John Nichols.

Contemporary contributors to this tradition who have served as Bellwether judges in previous years are Russell Banks, Martín Espada, Maxine Hong Kingston, Ursula K. Le Guin, Barry Lopez, Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki, Grace

Paley, Anna Quindlen, Fenton
Johnson, Charles Baxter, Ernest
Hebert, John Nichols, and Kathy
Pories.

In recent decades, issues of social
responsibility have held a less
commanding place in U.S. literature
than in the wider world. Social
commentary in our art is frequently
viewed with suspicion. Its advocacy
does not fall within the stated goals of
any major North American publisher,
endowment, or prize for the arts. The
Bellwether Prize was conceived to
address this deficiency. We would
like to see the place of conscience in
our nation's artistic landscape
restored to the same high position it
holds elsewhere in the world. By
means of this prize we hope to enlist
North American writers, publishers,
and readers to share in this crucial
endeavor.

Previous winners:

Kissing the Virgin's Mouth, Donna
Gershten, HarperCollins, 2001

The Book of Dead Birds, Gayle
Brandeis, HarperCollins, 2003

Correcting the Landscape, Marjorie
Kowalski Cole, HarperCollins,
2006

Mudbound, Hillary Jordan,
Algonquin, 2008

The Girl Who Fell From the Sky, Heidi
Durrow, Algonquin, (TBA)

*The Bellwether Prize,
established and funded by Barbara
Kingsolver, is administered as a non-
profit agency through National Writers
United Service Organization.*