

# Banking on a Prize: Multicultural Capitalism and the Canadian Literary Prize Industry

Jennifer Scott and Myka Tucker-Abramson

Volume 32, Number 1, 2007

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl32\\_1art01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl32_1art01)

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Scott, J. & Tucker-Abramson, M. (2007). Banking on a Prize:: Multicultural Capitalism and the Canadian Literary Prize Industry. *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 32(1), 5–20.

# Banking on a Prize: Multicultural Capitalism and the Canadian Literary Prize Industry

JENNIFER SCOTT AND MYKA TUCKER-ABRAMSON

FROM THE BEGINNING of Brian Mulroney's election campaign in 1988, it was clear that a vote for Mulroney was a vote for free trade. Everyone working within the Trudeau-era cultural apparatuses — apparatuses which attempted to foster the development of a distinctly nationalist Canadian system of artists and writers through content quotas, competition limitations, and immense cultural funding bodies — recognized that this election would decide the future direction of the Canadian cultural system; however, not everyone agreed on which direction was best. Frank Davey, in *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967*, argues that the 1988 election essentially functioned as a referendum on free trade. In order to map the effects of free trade on Canadian conceptions of culture, Davey focuses on two newspaper advertisements placed in the *Globe and Mail* the day before the federal election, both by groups of well-known Canadian cultural producers and critics. The two arguments were predictable: those who were opposed to free trade (or the “Mulroney-Reagan Trade Deal” as they called it) argued that a vote for Mulroney would harm “the Canada we care about” (qtd. in Davey 11), while those in support of free trade argued that

There is no threat to our national identity anywhere in the Agreement. Nor is there a threat to any form of Canadian cultural expression. As artists and writers, we reject the suggestion that our ability to create depends upon the denial of economic opportunities to our fellow citizens. (qtd. in Davey 12)

Davey points out the problems such a duality poses when he argues that the argument against free trade constructs a “discrete, single, uni-

form entity,” which is beyond or above politics (11), while the support for free trade — “we are not fragile” (qtd. 23) — aligns “Art with the non-fragile industrial production that seeks the homogenizing of economic rules which the free trade agreement moves towards ... [in moving towards] multinational capitalism” (23). Davey argues that in both cases, culture is assumed to be separable from the political — in the one case, they “speak disapprovingly of the ‘political’” (141) and see culture as something that should be protected; in the second case, they argue that “their ‘creativity’ has not only nothing to do with national issues but also nothing to do with the ‘economic’” (14). Culture is strong enough to stand up to politics. Davey’s case study of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) acts as an especially useful mirror to the debates raging through Canadian literature and the literary-prize industry today, and more specifically, to the recent coup of the corporate-sponsored Giller Prize over the Canada Arts Council-funded Governor General’s Award. What we propose here is to view the Governor General’s Award as a creation and upholder of the Trudeau-era multicultural policy, while seeing the Giller Prize as part of a new “cosmopolitan” and free-trade-oriented Canadian cultural policy.

Many critics, including Smaro Kamboureli, Himani Bannerji, Roy Miki, and Neil Bissoondath have offered trenchant critiques of the racism inherent in the Trudeau-era multicultural policy and the very notion of a united-protectionist Canada.<sup>1</sup> But in the absence of a more pointed insistence on the relationships between the ideas of nation and state in Trudeau’s cultural policies and his economic and political policies (and of the relationship between cultural and economic policy more generally), these critiques were unable to adequately attack the equally problematic alternative to this nationalist projection — namely, as we have seen through the FTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and, most recently, the newly created Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) partnerships, the blowing open of Canada’s borders to an increasingly Americanized global market, which has ironically served only to tighten Canada’s security policies and increase the racism and xenophobia of Canada’s immigration policies. Culturally in Canada, this has meant an increasing commodification of “ethnic” or “cosmopolitan” art and literature accompanied by a simultaneous attacking of the small presses and magazines, which originally fostered the very politically engaged and often dissident voices that laid the foundation for what became such “multicultural” literatures. In other words, free trade

has succeeded in creating the illusion of separation between economic and cultural spheres, while simultaneously increasing the dependence of culture on market forces. Absent from Canadian literary theory is a real reckoning with this separation, and its impacts both culturally and experientially. In light of this absence, we would like to return to the FTA arguments and let history respond to the question, what are the impacts of free trade on Canada's cultural apparatuses?

In "Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Hybridity," Barbara Godard points out that alongside free trade came cuts to the National Film Board and to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "re-directing production to for-profit media companies" (15). Godard also points out that the Canada Council was not spared these cuts, and following an additional five per cent cut in 1995, its mandate shifted "from working on 'public interest' on behalf of citizens to a corporate model of rationalization serving clients" (16). Such a change in mandate filtered down, influencing art and literature on all levels. At the same time as small presses either shut down or, like House of Anansi, were swallowed up by conglomerates, and independent bookstores caved in to Chapters and Indigo, another trend emerged: the already fraught themes typically associated with Canadian literature — Multiculturalism, Identity, Diaspora — began to proliferate in an increasingly problematic and digestible form. It is no coincidence that at this moment the Giller Prize surfaced on Canada's literary scene and, a decade later in 2005, that Scotiabank became its key corporate sponsor.

From corporate sponsorship to publishers' entrance fees, and from connections with HarperCollins and McClelland and Stewart to a glitzy and now nationally televised awards ceremony, the Giller prize has become the darling of Canada's literati. At its inception, Mordecai Richler (who unsurprisingly added his name to those "in favour of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement" (qtd. in Davey, 10)) praised the award in 1994 as "generously adding to the cornucopia" of "these blessed days of Canadian bestsellers, Canada Council grants [etc.]" He then proudly asserted that he, alongside his fellow judges Alice Munro and David Staines are "politically incorrect" and "don't give a damn whether a book has been written by a man or a woman, a black, gay, or Native writer, or somebody whose family has been here for 200 years. What [they'll] be looking for is the best work of fiction published by a Canadian in 1994" (Richler 1994). How comforting

his words are almost fifteen years later when the definition of the “best work” of fiction is intimately linked to the mandate of Scotiabank and Jack Rabinovitch, with help from Chapters-Indigo. Even more worrisome were the praises lavished on the prize when Scotiabank became the Giller’s chief supporter. These praises were epitomized by Cheri Hanson’s *Quill & Quire* article, which was actually titled “The Value of a Partnership: Title sponsorships — like the Scotiabank Giller Prize — have benefits for both parties.” Showing “both sides,” Hanson points out that “Rabinovitch says the deal was inked to ensure the award’s sustainability [and that] Scotiabank says its motives were a blend of philanthropy and admiration.” Both Richler and Hanson irresponsibly weave a narrative promoting the idea that corporate sponsorship will help “sustain” the funding of “good literature” through the work of impartial judges (unimpeded by “political correctness”), while ignoring the relationship between economic and cultural control, and refusing to dig deep enough to ask *who* decides what is “good literature” and *whose* interests that literature serves.

In recent years the Giller Prize has finally received a more critical assessment by literary and cultural critics. Smaro Kamboureli offers a more nuanced examination of the Giller Prize in her 2004 article, “The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy,” where she argues that “Canadian literature has indeed reached new heights of prominence.... The fact that prizes like the Giller award for fiction, the Griffin for poetry, and the Charles Taylor for literary non-fiction have substantial capital value may be one of the reasons for the attention garnered by literature today” (37). Kamboureli references a capital value that allows the Giller definition of Canadian literature to disseminate throughout both commercial and academic zones, pointing to its use of marketing strategies, media coverage, and its glamorous ceremony extending the “culture of celebrity” to include Giller-winning CanLit. Yet, Kamboureli is also careful to acknowledge the “tight relationship — structural, ideological, and material — between cultural production and the representation of nation, between institutions producing and disseminating literature ... and the apparatus of the state” (39). While Kamboureli gestures towards this analysis and implicitly calls for scholarship to wrestle with the implications of this “tight relationship,” she does not explore it in depth.

More recently, Stephen Henighan’s quickly ubiquitous and well-needed tirade in *GEIST* Magazine portrays the Giller Prize as a “conspicuous example of corporate suffocation of the public institutions

that built our literary culture” (61). While we agree with Henighan’s attack on the corporatization of the prize, our argument here is not that the emergence of the Giller Prize “irrevocably damage[d] the Canada we care about [read: the Canada of the GGs]” (qtd. in Davey 11). We are not interested in trying to return to a myth of the Canada of “public institutions,” nor do we want to return to the protectionist vision of Canada; we know too well that the Canada to which we would return is one that merely reifies a nationalism that succeeds for some, but only because of the violent exclusion of others. Rather, our argument is that the post-free trade cuts to national cultural apparatuses, which marked the Conservative Party’s policy throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (and which was carried out by the Liberals throughout the 1990s), created the space for, and invited, the corporatization of Canadian cultural policy. Our argument, then, is less about the need for a different type of literary prize than about the way the Giller Prize (and prize culture in general) can be shown to be an unavoidable symptom, and the natural outcome, of the neo-liberalization and economic globalization of Canada.

### **From Council to Corporation: The Privatization of Canadian Literature**

The Trudeau-era policy of multiculturalism, made official in 1988 through the Official Multiculturalism Act, maintains a cultural currency through the homogenized literature recognized in Canada’s current literary prize culture. While Trudeau’s policy of multiculturalism may seem inclusive, debate has surrounded the policy since its application in the early 1970s. Neil Bissoondath was among the most vocal critics, suggesting that Canadian multiculturalism is a “vision of government not content to let things be, determined to play a direct role in shaping not only the evolution of Canadian — mainly *English*-Canadian — society but the evolution of individuals within that society as well” (42). For Bissoondath, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act is the most overt, systematic governmental methodology of maintaining the binary construction between “Canadian” (read: white, English, middle or upper class) and “Other.” However, Bissoondath’s critique ultimately suggests a hierarchization of ethnicity with an overarching identity of “Canadian” occupying the top rung; his goal is simply one of inclusion into the top of this hierarchy instead of a critique of the necessarily exclusionary

nature of the hierarchy itself. Unlike Bissoondath, Himani Bannerji and Roy Miki explore the possibility of a Canadian identity that allows for a myriad of individual, ethnic identities. For example, Bannerji explains that the “non-white peoples” of Canada “provide a central part of the distinct pluralist unity of Canadian nationhood; on the other hand, this centrality is dependent on our [non-whites] ‘difference,’ which denotes the power of definition that ‘Canadians’ have over others” (69). In other words, Bannerji insists that Canada can accommodate plurality and multiculturalism, but only insofar as it maintains a distance between ‘Canadian,’ and ‘Other.’ This articulation of the unspoken assumption of ‘white’ identity as the norm is crucial to unpacking the complex underlying racial politics of Canadian multicultural policy both in the Trudeau era and today, when the very notion of a cosmopolitan literature is necessarily measured against an imaginary and illusory idea of an “original” and necessarily white Canadian literature.

According to Bannerji, “official multiculturalism,” alongside “mainstream political thought and the news media in Canada” not only supports a continued binarization of Canadian identity between “white” and “Other,” but also “rel[ies] comfortably on the notion of a nation and its state both called Canada, with legitimate subjects called Canadians, in order to construct [non-white Canadians] as categorical forms of difference” (104). To delegitimize non-white Canadians thereby reveals the contradiction inherent in the multicultural policy itself. Bannerji argues that, rather than acting as an apparatus that builds cultural and racial understanding between diverse groups of Canadian citizens, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act has been publicly promoted through the media in order to support an ongoing effort to entrench white English Canada as the normative Canadian identity against which all other identities are measured.

This binarization is a common undercurrent of understanding Canadian multiculturalism: as Daniel Coleman explained at the 2005 TransCanada Conference, the very employment of ‘multicultural’ as a category to delineate “the signs of otherness and difference ... indicates that there is a normative *Canadian*-Canadianness still in place against which these terms signify, and that normative Canadianness is white and British” (9). The recognition of the pervasive nature of white normativity in Canadian academic consciousness marks an important critical shift.

Like Bannerji, Roy Miki explains that the use of the term “multicul-

turalism,' for instance, allows for the construction of 'groups' (read here 'other' than those of British and European origin) who are assigned free will in maintaining 'separate ethnic identities'" (172). Miki challenges critics' attempts to praise the effect of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act on the Canadian canon through a race-analysis of Canadian literature taught — both historically and currently — in post-secondary Canadian institutions. In his analysis, Miki demonstrates the possibilities found within CanLit either to maintain the binary relationship between "Canada" and "Other," or to destabilize Trudeau-like definitions of multiculturalism. Miki turns to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), Marie Annharte Baker's *Being on the Moon* (1990), M. Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingstone* (1991), and Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral* (1990) for examples of literature that challenges Trudeau multiculturalism. Tellingly, only SKY Lee and Dionne Brand were nominated for the Governor General's Award: neither won. This sample of racially subversive texts suggests an unwillingness in Canadian prize culture to reward "ethnic minority" writers who do not foster a national Canadian culture that is at least partially defined by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and its binarization of the Canadian populace. In other words, he points to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act as merely operating in the literary sphere as yet another methodology of maintaining a racialized space of difference under the guise of Canadian nationalism.

Unlike Bissoondath, Miki, alongside Coleman and Bannerji, recognizes racial tension as being foundational to Canada's history. In other words, racism and racial hierarchies are not an aberration from the ideal of Canada; rather, the construction of difference is that which Canada is based upon. For Coleman, Bannerji, and Miki, a recognition of this tension is necessary for any attempt to destabilize the Eurocentric model of the multiculturalism dictated by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. However, the break with this Act and the dissolving of Trudeau-era cultural apparatuses did not have the potentially liberatory effects critics hoped, and this is because the change from the protectionist cultural policy (which includes Canada's Multiculturalism Act) to the globalized and free-market Canada, which has eliminated many of these funding programs, is not just a destabilization of Canadian cultural policy but, more simply, a new form of Canada's cultural policy — a policy that, as before, both reflects and fosters Canada's new political and economic policies.



Indeed, the racism embedded within the Multiculturalism Act and the Governor General's Award only intensified with the emergence of the privately funded and corporately sponsored Giller Prize. In 2003, five years after Miki's book was published, Mridula Nath Chakraborty explained the shift in what she names "the otherness industry." Chakraborty argues that there has been a shift from the postcolonial studies of the 1990s to "a new kind of orientalisng gaze that operates on the will-to-know the Other: through the market economy of first world consumption masquerading as globalisation" (127). The commercialization of the Giller Prize epitomizes Chakraborty's claim; as we will demonstrate, the Giller Prize-winning formula hinges upon the commodification and commercial exploitation of the same "Other" used by the Multiculturalism Act. For Chakraborty, "the Other, in pluralistic democracies, becomes fetishised and multipli-produced as an object of desire, while at the same time being socially articulated/discriminated against through the politics of difference" (127-28). If in an "official" policy of multiculturalism difference is marked with a cultural cachet while simultaneously maintaining the binary relationship between "Canadian" and "Other," as the policy of multiculturalism enters into an age of multinational capitalism, that cultural cachet simply transforms to economic.

In "Notes from the Cultural Field," Barbara Godard maps out the relationship between Chakraborty's "Other," multinational capitalism, and the literary industry when she argues that "Canadian literature is prized within this global economy since its multicultural diversity is readily exportable in translation" (228). If, as Godard argues, "literature works no longer in the service of the nation's identity ... but to further its economic security in an era of global capitalism" (211), then Canada — as expressed through its prize-winning literature — is no longer the geographic site of a national identity, but rather an economic site that allows Canada another mode of entry to global capitalism.

The effect of NAFTA on the publishing industry has not only facilitated "the merger of Random House of Canada and Doubleday Canada into a mega-publisher controlled by the German multinational Bertelsmann," but after "the gift of McClelland and Stewart ... to Random House in the summer of 2000, this multinational giant has a stranglehold on Canadian publishing" (227), thereby choking out small publishing houses and effectively homogenizing the Canadian publishing industry. In post-NAFTA Canada, "everything has changed

under the material conditions produced by the rise of a distinctively transnational capitalism” (222). For Godard, one result of transnational capitalism is that “sound cultural production and good publishing are evaluated on the extent to which they maximize profits for shareholders, not on the quality and force of ideas they put into circulation” (223). However, in her criticism of the Canadian publishing industry, Godard suggests that there is such a thing as “sound cultural production and good publishing,” suggesting the possibility of a qualitative value judgement that is discrete and uninfluenced by the capitalist societies of publication. This type of value judgement permeates the prize culture of Canada and surrounds both the Governor General’s Award and the Giller Prize. The very assumption of an a priori value judgement within her own critique of a transnational publication industry in Canada reinforces the idea that a literary marketplace — and therefore a literature — untouched by global capitalism is both possible and would lead to a quality of literature superior to that presently available. The underlying implication of Godard’s critique is one of nostalgia for a Canadian literary past where writers could create literature without the agenda of the current globalized economy. This type of nostalgia is dangerous. Although NAFTA and a global economy were lesser — or non-existent — concerns for authors of the past, there has never been a golden age of inclusivity. To attempt to uphold the flawed logic of a better, purer past upholds the same binary hierarchical structure as Canadian multiculturalism.

Indeed, what makes the Giller Prize so problematic is not its break with the policies of Canadian multiculturalism, but its continuation and co-optation of the anti-free trade movement’s protectionist language, specifically through its articulation of its commitment to finding the “best” in “Canadian” literature. The dangerous turn that occurs here is that transnational capitalism is able to hide inside, and position itself as part of, the national imaginary. It uses the national rhetoric of a “united” and “multicultural” Canada, but only insofar as such rhetoric can easily be commodified and sold both to Canadians and on the international market. This sleight of hand whereby a for-profit cultural industry takes on the language of the national cultural apparatus is an important one, and needs further emphasis; while both the Giller and the Massey Report strive for “excellence in Canadian literature” (Scotiabank), their terms of reference are radically different. The Massey Report asked the question, “Is it true, then, that we are a people with-

out a literature?” (222-23) and spent the rest of its “Literature” section expressing both the need for a national literature and a (proposed) governmental role in its creation. For the Massey Report, a national literature should be defined “as [being] characteristic of the nation by other nations, and that it must in consequence have the human appeal and the aesthetic value to awaken the interest and sympathy, and to arouse the admiration of other peoples” (223). While the Giller Prize also measures national literature by the “growing recognition of Canadian authors and literature both at home and abroad” (Scotiabank), its terms are nakedly economic. The website brags that, “More than 2.5 million Giller-nominated books were sold in the first 10 years of the prize,” that “Over \$60 million dollars in book sales to date have been generated as a direct result of the prize,” and that “The Giller Prize has so far endowed more than \$250,000 to Canadian writers from coast to coast” (Scotiabank). This conflation between their mandate, of “celebrating the best in Canadian literature” and “bringing these books to the attention of all Canadians” with raw sales figures is a cynical slippage that naturalizes equivocations between art and market.

### **Rewarding a Literary Class System: Bringing it Back to the Prize**

What makes this shift so problematic is that it is symptomatic of the larger ideological acceptance that the market is the only (or at least only important) sphere that literature is capable of inhabiting. While, as Benedict Anderson so famously pointed out, “the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity” (34) and books have always been entangled in capitalism, such a relationship has never been absolute or one-way. From the “little magazine” culture and worker-theatre programs so prevalent in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s to the punk culture of D.I.Y. zines today, literature and cultural production have continually sought out spaces that resist the commodity-based publishing system. The hyphen in Anderson’s “print-capitalism” (39) marks an important separation between the two, even if the historical movement of capitalism continually attempts to push them together. The successful colonization of the literary prize industry by corporate-sponsored organizations translates into a further expansion of capitalism into the sphere of culture. To accept corporate control over what constitutes the “best” in Canadian literature is to accept that literature must or should be measured economically and, perhaps more worryingly,

that corporations should define what is “Canadian literature,” and to a certain extent, what is Canada. The two questions then that need to be asked is, what kind of literature and what kind of “nation” does such a corporatized prize culture hope to create?

In *The University in Ruins*, Bill Readings uses the term “excellence” to trace the break between the university’s past role as “the ideological arm of the nation-state” (the “University of Culture” (41)) and its present role “as bureaucratic corporation” (21) (the “University of Excellence” (41)). While our concern here is literature and not the university, the break Readings traces (culminating in the university’s embrace of the term “excellence”) offers a useful parallel for the comparable ideological transition of the nation to corporation (culminating in the term “the best”), which is occurring in the literary prize industry. The question Readings asks so provocatively is, what does the term “excellence” (or in our case, “the best”) actually signify?

From his analysis of *Maclean’s* and other magazines’ rating systems of universities and the language of Borrero Cabal’s *The University as an Institution Today*, alongside articles by administrators within the university system, Readings concludes that the language of excellence signals “the relinquishing of the University’s role as a model of even the contractual social bond in favor of the structure of an autonomous bureaucratic corporation” (35). An analysis of the Giller Prize’s website (“celebrating the best”) and claims like Mordecai Richler’s that he seeks “the best” reveal a similar ideological transition. However, whereas Readings sees this transition as one that renders his subject as “no longer primarily an ideological arm of the nation-state but an autonomous bureaucratic corporation” (40), we feel that in fact the transition from nation-state to corporation signals the transformation of the literary field from that of the ideology of the nation state to the ideology of the corporate state. Slavoj Žižek makes the important observation that “the struggle for ideological and political hegemony is ... always the struggle for the appropriation of the terms which are ‘spontaneously’ experienced as ‘apolitical’, as transcending political boundaries” (3). While, as Readings points out, a term like “excellence” finds its power precisely because it has “no external referent or internal content” (23) — in other words, no political or social content — this does not make these terms non-ideological, but rather places them at the centre of ideological struggles. Thus, it is in terms like “excellence” or “the best

of Canadian literature” that we find the true kernel of this ideological and political struggle.

While corporate sponsorship offers positive aspects to certain Canadian authors (namely a larger prize purse, more widespread marketing, and exposure to larger reading publics), the vast majority of writers, publishers, and critics have a much more ambivalent relationship to what J.A. Wainwright calls “the big business of Canadian literature”(241). The “big business” of corporate sponsorship begs readers and critics alike to question whose interests are being represented in prize-winning literature. Moreover, what kind of Canada is being represented through these literatures? What, or who, does such a representation exclude? The class system of the Giller Prize is defined in the “Conditions of the Prize” (Scotiabank). Not only will the publisher of any short-listed book be required “to pay \$1,500 to The Scotiabank Giller Prize as a contribution towards shortlist advertising and promotion,” but will also be required “to spend an appropriate sum on media advertising for the winning book,” as well as “to prepare and encourage its nominated and/or winning author(s) to participate in all reasonable publicity associated with The Scotiabank Giller Prize, including interviews, readings, and appearances” (Scotiabank). The conditions of the prize do not offer definitions of vague terms such as “appropriate,” and “reasonable,” nor does the website suggest who might be responsible for this decision making: is it the Prize, the publisher, or the author who determines what is “appropriate,” and “reasonable”? In “Giller’s Version,” Henighan argues against the exclusivity of the prize cemented by the entry fee, suggesting that “even this limited sample [of 55-60 long-listed Giller prize nominees] might not be able to afford the short-list admission fee” (4). Henighan goes as far as to suggest that “future Giller shortlists are likely to resemble that of 1996, when ... McClelland & Stewart and Knopf Canada walked away with all the nominations” (4). For Henighan, the entry fee — which has, incidentally, increased from \$1250 to \$1500 since Henighan wrote his article in 1997 — acts as a means for the Giller to “merely confirm the status of writers already possessed of a wealthy publisher” (4-5). In other words, the Giller Prize rewards established writers and publishing houses rather than fostering new and innovative work, and it rewards financial stability and success rather than honouring small-scale publishing, whose focus is less nakedly economic.

In *Quill & Quire*’s November 2005 issue, Derek Weiler argues that

one of the positive aspects of the Scotiabank-Giller partnership is that, whereas in “the past, any griping about the award [i.e. Random House’s remarkable record of winning] has run the risk of looking like unseemly ingratitude toward the generosity of founder Jack Rabinovitch,” corporate sponsorship “might encourage more public discussion about the way [the Giller prize is] run” (8). Indeed it has. The nexus between Rabinovitch, Scotiabank, and Random House is receiving an increasing amount of critical attention. In 2005, all but one of the books short listed for the Scotiabank Giller Prize were published by Random House or its imprints — Joan Barfoot’s *Luck* (Knopf Canada), Camilla Gibb’s *Sweetness in the Belly* (Doubleday Canada), Edeet Ravel’s *A Wall of Light* (Random House) — or by McClelland and Stewart, which printed 2005 Giller Prize winner David Bergen’s *The Time in Between* (incidentally, Random House owns 25% of McClelland and Stewart). The exception is Lisa Moore’s *Alligator*, which was published by House of Anansi Press, a small press that was initially bought by Stoddart and subsequently sold to Scott Griffin of the Griffin Poetry Prize.

While the 2006 Giller Prize competition broke with this tradition by releasing the longlist and with four out of five shortlisted books coming from small presses, Henighan makes the important point that we cannot read this change as separate from “the significance of Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood withdrawing their 2006 titles from consideration for the Giller. This canny strategy enabled the old guard to become kingmakers” (“Kingmakers” 63). Similarly, Brian Bethune points out that four-time juror David Staines has given a “gift to conspiracy theorists.” Staines, one of the three initial jurors of the Giller Prize, has eerily close connections to McClelland and Stewart: “not only is he the editor of its New Canadian Library series, but each time he’s served on a jury, an M&S author has won” (68). Bethune’s articulation of the close-knit relationships between the Canadian publishing industry, the Giller Prize, and the literary community exposes the effect of a capitalist economy on a prize that posits itself as capable of finding “the best.” Dan Rowe foregrounds the effect of the ever-shrinking publishing industry on prize-winning Canadian fiction by suggesting that it is only the books of two (or, as Rowe suggests, one and three-quarters) “wealthy” publishing houses that qualify for the prize. He echoes Bethune’s prediction that “it is unlikely that a small-press book will ever win the Giller” (Rowe 68).

Moreover, even if and when small-press books win Gillers, the prob-

lem still remains with the form of the prize, which is best summed up in the Richler claim mentioned earlier, which argues that the Giller judges will be “looking for is the best work of fiction published by a Canadian in 1994.” By shutting down discussions of the political and ideological content behind his claim, Richler is attempting to draw the public away from the always politically and socially mediated process by which a text is considered “the best”; instead, by asking readers to trust the judges, he effectively transforms Canadian readers into consumers doing little more than reading literary consumer reports.

Nonetheless, while systems are never completely exempt from monopolization and corporatization, commodification clearly proliferates the literary industry, literature still can and does challenge these structures. As Stuart Hall so eloquently suggests, “that old dialectic is not at an end. Globalization does not finish it off” (27). It is deterministic and not particularly useful to argue that literature has been commodified, full stop. As producers, creators, and readers of literature, we do not need to accept capitalist norms and values as inherent or absolute. There is still a plethora of literatures that both grapple with the material realities of capitalism while simultaneously reimagining new forms of resistance. And if this literature is more difficult to find, it is as much the fault of critics as of corporations. If literature has been commodified, then so too has the academy and literary criticism. Roy Miki argues that in order “to problematize the function of readership in current capitalist terms, that is, to transform the process of reading from passive consumption to critical interchange,” critics and academics have two roles. First, we must

generate the formal conditions so that the subjectivity of the writer, as a complex weave of internal and external pressures, can emerge in textual practice; and ... advance theoretical principles malleable enough to account for the enactment of subjectivities that cannot be contained by codification in mainstream critical discourse. (118-19)

While here Miki’s theory functions to create a critical space for Asian Canadian writers, his conditions are equally useful for talking about Canadian literature more specifically, and resisting the commodification of literature more generally.

The solution will not be found in an alternative prize system, but rather in a closer examination of the location of prize culture within the increasingly market-driven and capitalist Canadian state and its cultural

apparatuses. If we are to create space for a true multiculturalism, for a true multiplicity of voices, we need to reject the kind of political system which creates prize cultures that focus upon the definition and creation of a national literature for exclusionary, expropriatory, and marketing purposes. What we are proposing, then, is not an envisioning of new or better cultural apparatuses, but instead the unmasking of the politics behind these apparatuses. It is only through such an unmasking that we can truly resist the attempts to define, market, and limit cultural production, and begin to look towards the diversity of voices that struggle against the competing pressures of the still-present nation state and multinational capitalism.

### AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors would like to thank Sophie McCall, Naava Smolash, and David Chariandy for all their support and guidance.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Especially in the case of Bannerji, these critiques have been firmly rooted within a more general theory of the nation-state and the complex and ambivalent relationship it has with immigrants and visible minorities more generally.

### WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 1991.
- Baker, Marie Annharte. *Being on the Moon*. Winlaw: Polestar, 1990.
- Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' P, 2000.
- Bethune, Brian. "Gorilla Giller." *Maclean's* 3 Nov. 2003: 68.
- Bissoondath, Neil. *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*. Toronto: Penguin, 1994.
- Brand, Dionne. *No Language is Neutral*. Toronto: Coach House, 1990.
- Canada. *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-1951*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951. (Commissioner: Edmund Cloutier.) 3 Jan. 2007 <<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/2/5/h5-400-e.html>>.



- Chakraborty, Mridula Nath. "Nostalgic Narratives and the Otherness Industry." *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 127-39.
- Coleman, Daniel. "From Canadian Trance to TransCanada: White Civility and the CanLit Project." Paper presented at the TransCanada Conference, Vancouver. 23-26 June 2005.
- Davey, Frank. *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel since 1967*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993.
- Godard, Barbara. "Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Hybridity." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 209-58.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Condition for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 27.
- Hanson, Cheri. "The Value of a Partnership." *Quill & Quire* Nov. 2005: 12.
- Henighan, Stephen. "Giller's Version." *Canadian Forum* Dec. 1997: 4-6.
- . "Kingmakers: The Giller: Insiders only, please." *GEIST* 15.63 (2006): 61-63.
- . *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*. Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2002.
- Kamboureli, Smaro. "The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy." *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2004.
- Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Boston: D.R. Godine, 1981.
- Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.
- Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.
- Philip, M. Nourbese. *Looking for Livingstone*. Stratford: Mercury, 1991.
- Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Rowe, Dan. "Surprising Giller Shortlist Dominated by Random House — Again." *Quill & Quire* Sept. 2005: 68.
- Richler, Mordecai. "Richler on the Giller (Speech)" *Quill & Quire*. Mar. 2004: 87.
- Scotiabank Giller Prize. 7 Feb. 2007 <<http://www.scotiabankgillerprize.ca/guidelines.htm>>.
- Wainwright, J.A. "The Favourite Game: Canadian Literature In and Out." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 71 (2000): 241-48.
- Weiler, Derek. "The Choosers and the Chosen." *Quill & Quire* Nov. 2005: 8.
- Žižek, Slavoj. "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* Sept.-Oct. 1995: 28-51.