

## TRENDS IN COLLECTING

### *The Scotiabank Giller Prize*

ALTHOUGH NOT AS widely collected or hyped as the Man Booker Prize, the Scotiabank Giller Prize (formerly called the Giller Prize) should not be underestimated for either its selection of top Canadian fiction or its difficulty for modern literary collectors.

In brief, the Giller Prize was founded by Jack Rabinovitch in honour of his wife, Doris Giller, who rose to a respected status within the literary and newspaper community before her death in 1993. One of Doris's big accomplishments was establishing a new standard for book reviews for the *Montreal Gazette*.

M.G. Vassanji won the inaugural Giller Prize (1994) for *The Book of Secrets*. The book was first published as a trade paperback with French flaps. To find a truly exquisite copy now (without the Giller Prize Winner sticker, without crease marks to either the spine or the French flaps and without fading to the text block) is very difficult.

A review of the list of winners following Vassanji (who won again in 2003) suggests the prize has done a good job of promoting "Canadian literary heavyweights." Although there may be some difference of opinion about who is a literary heavyweight in Canada, I would argue that every year the prize has been won by a heavyweight with three exceptions: the surprising selection in 1999 of Bonnie Burnard's *A Good House* over Timothy Findley's *Pilgrim*; David Bergen's win for *The Time In Between* (2005); and this past year's selection of Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*. Although Bergen has published several works, I wouldn't put him in the same class as Giller winners Atwood, Munro, Mistry, Ondaatje or Richler. And for those who would argue that Richard B. Wright (*Clara Callan*, 2001) and Austin Clarke (*The Polished Hoe*, 2002) are not heavyweights, I would urge them to sit down and read any two of their works—I am confident that their opinion will change after these readings.

As for collecting the prizewinners, a challenge awaits any serious collector looking for copies in perfect condition that have been signed by the author. Mordecai Richler is no longer alive, and finding mint signed copies of *Barney's Version* (1997) has become very difficult over the past five years. Alice Munro, who has won twice, is getting older and is not participating in public signings to the extent that she used to. Only a small number of

copies of *Runaway* (2004) were signed, and they are commanding prices of US\$400 or more for mint copies. *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) is an older book and will become even more difficult to find in mint, signed condition.

The most difficult Giller winner to find over the next few years will be the most recent, Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*. It was initially published in the spring of 2006 in a hardcover edition of 5,000 copies. It was then released in trade paperback format a few months later. The hardcover edition has vanished from sight; the publisher has no more first printings, and there aren't any copies to be found in Chapters/Indigo or on [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com). The real mystery is, where did they go?

Although the Giller Prize has emphasized literary heavyweights, the prize has done an excellent job of promoting some of the younger or newer literary talent rising up in Canada. My favourite year is still 1996, when the first novels of Ann-Marie MacDonald, Anne Michaels and Gail Anderson-Dargatz were all included on the short list. MacDonald's and Michaels' books both became hypermoderns. The only male writer to be shortlisted that year, Guy Vanderhaeghe, was lost in the hype that surrounded the four female finalists, but he did manage to win the Governor General's Literary Award the same year for his wonderful novel *The Englishman's Boy*.

As for publisher representation, Random House virtually owns the winners' list: titles distributed by Random House of Canada have taken 11 of the 14 prizes awarded to date. Only one of their titles was nominated this past year, but it was also the winner, Lam's *Bloodletting*.

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