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"Now, my Boy, Listen to Daddy"

William Arthur Deacon and His Influence on the Governor General's Literary Awards

William Arthur Deacon was Canada's first full-time book reviewer, the book editor of the *Globe and Mail* from 1928 to 1960, and an important member of the Canadian Authors Association (CAA). In 1935, Albert Robson, president of the Toronto branch of the CAA, wrote to Deacon seeking his advice on how the association could improve the economic and cultural position of authors in Canada. Deacon's response to Robson positions himself at the very heart of Canadian letters: "I speak as one who has mothered Canadian literature for 15 years and learned a great deal of publishing and the troubles of authors and of readers' taste and influencing it" (Letter to Robson). Deacon would later point to this letter as the origin of the Governor General's Literary Awards (GG awards), because one of the four suggestions in his letter was to establish an awards system. His letter to Robson, however, reveals far more about Deacon than it does about the history of the award. In it, he unabashedly appoints himself a parental role and boasts of his ability to influence Canadian literature. As Clara Thomas and John Lennox note in their biography of the man: "[Deacon] set out, not only to nurture and encourage Canadian writers, but in a sense to instruct them in what and how a Canadian writer should write and in what a Canadian should and could be" (37). Importantly, Deacon, as the book editor for Canada's most important daily newspaper, was in a position of power that allowed him to impose his strongly held views onto others. In fact, few people could influence the literary marketplace in mid-century Canada as Deacon could. While scholars have written about Deacon's role as a book reviewer and editor, what remains unacknowledged

is the paternalistic role that he played in influencing the GG awards to consecrate literature that satisfied his idea of what Canadian literature should be—good, popular books that attracted a wide reading audience and supported a national literary culture. Specifically, this article uses letters found in Deacon's archives to illustrate the degree to which Deacon was able to influence Canada's oldest literary award.

The Governor General's Literary Awards are the most enduring creation of the Canadian Authors Association. The CAA was established in 1921 by a group of writers who created a number of initiatives to advocate for, and advance the position of, Canadian authorship. In the first few decades of the association's existence, the CAA was consistently debating with other members of the literary field over who could qualify as a Canadian author and what constituted Canadian literature. Although this debate was complex and nuanced, and lasted over several decades, it often revolved around the relationship between writers and the marketplace. The CAA actively advocated for the idea that writers should be financially compensated for their writing, and, as such, the association supported a wide range of literary genres. The CAA often faced critics, however, who wanted to see literature divorced from market concerns and were dismissive of writers of popular genre-fiction.[1] Deacon, as a prominent member of the CAA, supported the association's conception of literature, and as this paper argues, used the GG awards as a tool to advance the association's position in this ongoing debate. James English has noted in his foundational work on prize culture, *The Economy of Prestige*, that prizes "place[] a certain power . . . in the hands of cultural functionaries—those who organize and administer it behind the scenes, oversee the selection of members or judges, attract sponsors or patrons, make rules and exceptions to rules" (52). Deacon was aware of the power of the GG awards, and sought to use it to further his personal views.

While literary awards place power in the hands of those who run them, they also have the ability to influence the literary field. As English argues, when "the era of explicit colonial occupation and control began to wane" in the early twentieth century, cultural prizes became "part of the struggle to formulate and project a coherent indigenous national culture" (265). English argues that in this struggle the prize becomes a powerful tool to define a literary field that was often divided between praising "the distinct cultural achievements of the colony, or the successful advancement on colonial terrain of Europe's metropolitan culture" (268). The GG awards, then, as the only national literary prizes in mid-century Canada, played an important role in

this debate between the role of nationalist and cosmopolitan writing. Yet, the role that literary prizes played in this struggle, however, has not been thoroughly discussed. Canadian scholarship on literary prestige, however, does offer some parallels with the role that the GG awards played in mid-century Canada. Lorraine York's 2007 study, *Literary Celebrity in Canada,* for example, looks at the way that fame, for literary celebrities, is a performance. Specifically, York's work is interested in how authors "must constantly negotiate the seemingly exclusive worlds of popularity and literary prestige" (31). York explores the ways that authors balance these worlds in her author-centric study. The emphasis for Deacon was on both author *and* the text, as he conceived the ideal award-winning book as one that could straddle the worlds of both economic and cultural capital. In focusing on Deacon here, I want to emphasize the role of cultural workers in the creation of literary prestige.[2]

Gillian Roberts' important contribution to the study of awards, *Prizing Literature*, discusses the three major Canadian literary prizes, but her examination begins at the establishment of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957. For her project, which relates Canadian prize culture to both the state and to the global marketplace, this temporal demarcation makes sense. But it leaves unexamined Canadian prize culture prior to the advent of federal patronage of the arts following the Massey Commission. Roberts' discussion of the GG awards, Canada's oldest national literary prize, begins after the Canada Council took control of the awards in 1959. However, the CAA established the GG awards in 1936. Prize culture, in Canada at least, was very different at this moment. The GG awards were the only national prize for Canadian literature; they did not come with any financial compensation and, despite the name, they had no direct connection to the state, or to state funding. Perhaps most importantly, they were created fifteen years before the Massey Report suggested that Canadian literature, as a category, did not yet exist. In other words, the GG awards were presented to Canadian authors for having produced the best works of Canadian literature, while the very concept of Canadian literature itself was still being heavily interrogated.

It is in this cultural moment, prior to the Massey Commission, that Deacon attempted to use the GG awards to influence the type of literature that was being produced in Canada. No other single person had the amount of influence over the creation and administration of the awards during their first two decades that Deacon had. From 1937-1959, 108 people acted as judges for the GG awards, with a handful of people serving as

a judge for multiple years. Deacon, however, acted as a judge, or ran the Awards Committee, for more than sixty percent of the contests, far more than anyone else. Deacon was also instrumental in establishing policies around how the awards were judged. Although not always successful, Deacon attempted to influence the GG awards so that they were awarded to authors who promoted his view of literature, which championed popular writing, living wages for authors, and a national literary culture. This view of literature is echoed throughout Deacon's writings—particularly the focus on selecting material that is *actually* read by the public. As such, in this cultural moment, prize culture in Canada was being used to promote as many working writers as possible who were producing literature for a wide reading public. Despite Deacon's power, this conception of literature failed to dominate in the postwar era with the onset of government patronage. The prize culture that has emerged since the onset of government patronage following the Massey Commission has focused on establishing literature that is palatable to both Canadians and the world, often with the sanctioning being extranational. As Roberts notes, more recently, "the complicated relationship between Canadian literature as circulated within Canada and Canadian literature as an international commodity depends upon the external validation of Canadian cultural products and the writers who produce them" (4). At mid-century, however, the GG awards were performing a very different task. Few Canadian writers were able to live off of their writing, and the reading public was consuming mostly American books and periodicals. As such, instead of trying to support Canadian literature that would be palatable to the world, Deacon was using the GG awards to try and make Canadian literature appealing to Canadians, by awarding texts that would actually be read.

Essential to an account of Deacon's involvement in the GG awards is an understanding of his literary taste, which was nationalistic, popularist, and anti-modernist. Nowhere is this more clear than in an exchange with Earle Birney in 1946. On behalf of the CAA, Deacon had been attempting to find a new editor to replace Watson Kirkconnell for the CAA's *Canadian Poetry Magazine*. Deacon found his new editor in Birney, who discussed with Deacon his plans for changing the magazine. Birney explained that he hoped to get poems for the magazine from modernist poets such as A. J. M. Smith, A. M. Klein, F. R. Scott, Charles Bruce, Ronald Hambleton, Anne Wilkinson, and Ralph Gustafson. In recruiting these writers, Birney was hoping to get "new blood" into the magazine (Letter to Deacon, 24 July 1946). While

Deacon assured Birney that no one from the CAA executive would interfere in his editorial decisions, he felt the need to comment on the authors that Birney hoped to include in the magazine:

> I am surprised that the poets I fail to comprehend—fail to the point where I dare not attempt to review their books—seem to be exactly those you now wish to fill the pages of our magazine. I don't wish to debate the point. I merely express and echo your own opinion that a bunch of our Ph. D's, writing for other Ph. D.'s with obscure allusions, will never win my readership. (Deacon, Letter to Birney, 9 Aug. 1946)

Such a response is telling of Deacon's view of the contemporary literary scene. He is dismissive of the entire group of poets that Birney hopes to include in *Canadian Poetry Magazine* because their writing is highbrow, difficult, and purposefully inaccessible to average readers. His disgust with "the whole crowd of poseurs" (Deacon, Letter to Birney, 9 Aug. 1946), however, extends beyond distaste for their art. He is angered by the idea that the modernists' view of literature is different than his own. While Deacon believed that literature should be bought and read, the modernists consistently showed disdain for any concern about economic interests. Deacon felt that if Canadian literature was going to grow and develop, Canadians needed to buy and read Canadian books, which meant that authors should write books that people would actually want to read.

While Deacon was not alone in his distaste of the modernist poets and their writing, his position in the literary field afforded him unique power to influence the reading public. Despite his self-deprecation (without "brains and education enough to understand" these poets [Deacon, Letter to Birney, 9 Aug. 1946]), he was *not* an average reader. He was the literary editor for one of Canada's most widely read newspapers, in which he "dare[d] not attempt to review their books." As such, his disavowal of these poets was not simply a personal aesthetic decision, or rejection of their poetry, but a boycotting of their work at what amounted to a national level because of the *Globe*'s distribution. As Birney has noted, Deacon's "review[s] could launch or sink a new Canadian book" (*Spreading* 79). In stating that he avoids the work of modernist poets, Deacon shows that he is willing to use his power to influence the literary marketplace, and he appears to have been sincere. For example, of the forty-one books in all four categories that were under consideration for the GG awards for 1945,[3] the *Globe and Mail* published reviews of all but five. These reviews appeared almost exclusively in the *Saturday Review of Books*, which was edited by Deacon. Of the thirty-six reviews published, seventeen are explicitly attributed to Deacon, while

another six have no byline but might be assumed to have been written by Deacon as the literary editor. Of the five books not reviewed, the most conspicuous absences are Earle Birney's *Now is Time* (which won the GG award for poetry) and F. R. Scott's *Overture*. This synopsis of reviews from 1945 suggests that Deacon used his position, whether as review author or section editor, to ignore and thus disadvantage modernist poets. As Deacon was wielding power as literary editor, at the newspaper and as member of the CAA, his influence over the Canadian literary marketplace also extended impressively to his role as a judge, and then as Chairman of the Awards Committee, for the GG awards.

Deacon and the Governor General's Awards

During the first decade of the GG awards' existence, judges were expected to discuss amongst themselves and come to an agreement over which book should win. The system of judging, however, was continually evolving as problems and questions arose. In 1938, for example, during his first year as a judge, Deacon wrote to Roderick S. Kennedy, Acting National Secretary of the CAA, asking for clarification on how the judging operated: "Do I render decision to you or consult with other Judges? Do I vote for one [book] only or grade three in order of merit?" (qtd. in Kennedy). Unsure of the answer, Kennedy wrote to Pelham Edgar, CAA President, for clarification.

> For three or four Judges in different cities to consult would seem difficult. For two in one city to get together and make a decision would put the third in another city into a position he would not appreciate.
>
> Last year, as far as I can remember, the Judges gave their choice, and one or two alternatives with the reasons, and with the strength of their opinion . . . then communicated with the other Judges, until a decision was reached. (Kennedy)

Requiring judges to come to a unanimous decision amongst themselves not only proved tedious and time-consuming, but also allowed for disagreements.

The problems with this type of judging in the first decade of the awards are clearly evident in an example from 1939. Deacon was the chairman of the committee of judges entrusted to choose the best book of non-fiction published the previous year. His two co-judges were E. J. Pratt and V. B. Rhodenizer. On March 9, Deacon wrote to Eric Gaskell, National Secretary of the CAA, with the results of the committee's voting. The two books competing for the top spot were John Murray Gibbon's *Canadian Mosaic* and George Wrong's *The Canadians: The Story of a People*. Deacon writes: "on straight vote,

Wrong wins over Gibbon—two firsts and a second against one first and two seconds" (Letter to Gaskell, 9 Mar. 1939). Deacon and Pratt had voted for Wrong to win, while Rhodenizer had voted for Gibbon. Although Wrong won in the voting, he did not win the award, which was given to Gibbon.

Wrong did not win the award because, as Deacon explained to Gaskell, "Arithmatic [sic] . . . is only part of the story" (Letter to Gaskell, 9 Mar. 1939). As chairman of the selection committee, Deacon was not bound by the results of the vote, which he found to be too restrictive as it did not allow for nuance and failed to accurately represent the whole "story." In writing to Gaskell, Deacon explains that "Rhodenizer is so strong for Gibbon that it balances the slight edge that Pratt and I accord Wrong." Deacon had other reservations as well. He notes that he is "strictly against posthumous awards," noting that Wrong is eighty and, "Should he die, I would switch instantly to Gibbon." He continues:

> These votes being equal, actually, it comes down with me to the question of whether we should remember all Gibbon has done for [the Canadian Authors Association] and use this means to thank him, or whether we should use the medal as a suggestion to Wrong that he might leave the CAA something in his will. (Letter to Gaskell, 9 Mar. 1939)

Deacon's reservations demonstrate that literary merit is only one of the concerns for him as a judge, which he openly admits: "These are the thoughts of an officer [of the CAA], not of a judge." He is not, however, apologetic about this approach: "these are *our* medals, it comes down to a straight question of personalities and which winner would be most acceptable to the Association" (Letter to Gaskell, 9 Mar. 1939, Deacon's emphasis). It is clear that Deacon, by the awards' third year, had already realized that the awards could be used to the CAA's advantage in advancing their view of Canadian authorship. Following his letter to Gaskell, Deacon also sent a letter to Leslie Gordon Barnard, the President of the CAA, repeating his concerns, and adding that "Gibbon will be hurt if he loses" and that Wrong "is comparatively wealthy" (Letter to Barnard). For Deacon, then, some criteria for winning the award might include the age of the author, the financial situation of the author, the author's temperament, and perhaps most importantly, if by winning the author would help the association.

Gaskell responded to Deacon in two separate letters. In the first, Gaskell is careful to remain impartial, and advocates for the necessary objectivity of the award system. Gaskell notes that "on straight vote, the award goes to *The*

Canadians," and reminds Deacon that that "THIS IS A LITERARY AWARD" (Letter to Deacon, Official, Gaskell's emphasis). However, Gaskell is receptive to Deacon's problem of the two books being closely tied on the level of "merit," and suggests that Deacon decide "which of [the two books] makes the more pertinent contribution to our knowledge of Canadian problems?" (Letter to Deacon, Official). In his second letter, he argues that age is not a relevant factor, and encourages Deacon to select Wrong's book "in the spirit of the competition," reminding Deacon that Wrong is an author, and "'literary merit' is not confined to younger writers" (Letter to Deacon, Personal). Gaskell acknowledges that Gibbon has been a friend to the association—having "pulled the CAA's chestnuts out of the fire on more than one occasion"—but insists that this must be a "secondary consideration—in fact, it is not even in the stars, in a literary competition" (Letter to Deacon, Personal). Contrary to Deacon, the pragmatist, Gaskell, the idealist, is concerned with preserving the ethics of the award system itself, ensuring it remains objective, with decisions based on literary merit alone.

Deacon sent two letters in reply. Writing in his official capacity as committee chairman, Deacon informs Gaskell that the judges "unanimously agree" that the 1938 Award of the Governor-General's medal for General literature is to be awarded to John Murray Gibbon (Letter to Gaskell, Official). This "unanimous" decision is the result recorded for history. In a personal letter to Gaskell, however, Deacon thanks Gaskell for his advice, noting that it helped him, before explaining why he disregarded it:

> Now, my Boy, listen to Daddy. In your youthful idealism you believe there is a way to pick one [book] as superior to another. I do not think so. I believe these two, though different, are as equal as two unlike things can be. Edgar, Pratt, Rhodenizer, being professors, judge by faults—the "mistakes" of school days. Hence I ignore most of what they say. . . .
>
> I found these two [books] equal on points. . . . Hence, despite all you say, if there is some other consideration to throw in the balance, that may turn the scale. I found that in what I conceive to be Wrong's indifference to the honor. Though well off, he refused to pay for copies of his book for the judges. I take it [from this that] he is indifferent to the medal. . . . and it certainly cannot do him as much good as it will do [Gibbon]. (Letter to Gaskell, Personal)

Deacon belittles Gaskell by positioning him as a child who needs to be taught why his idealism is misplaced. In these condescending remarks, Deacon assumes a paternal role, and suggests that he alone is able to properly judge the books, despite the fact that much of his reasoning is personal and subjective. Although Deacon claims to agree with Gaskell "in

the main" about "pure decisions," in the end, he is thankful for the subjective nature of the awards: "thank God, we control this matter and our business is chiefly to see that the medals go to fit people and are handed out where they will do most good to recipients and to our craft as a whole. We are often going to find that . . . we shall give a medal to M because N got it last year, or something like that" (Letter to Gaskell, Personal). In this exchange, it is possible to glean Deacon's understanding of what a literary award should, and should not, do. He rejects a purely academic appraisal of the work; instead, other factors surrounding the author need to be considered to ensure that Canadian literature—"our craft as a whole"—benefits from the awards. In this way, the definition of a prize-winning author becomes flexible. Deacon is thankful that the CAA controls the awards, and can control who wins, so that the association could use the awards to influence the literary field. If winning a GG award consecrates an author, helps their books sell more, and encourages Canadians to read their work, then the awards become a powerful tool to shape, indirectly, how Canadian literature develops. This was especially important at a time when members of the literary field were debating the type of literature that should be produced in Canada. Deacon was able to consciously award books that appealed to his idea of an ideal Canadian text. Importantly, Deacon was able to control the awards without having to publicly defend his view of literature, a convenience not afforded to the association's critics. As he continued to judge the awards, his conception of an award-winning text became more nuanced, but can still be traced to this early attempt at articulating his motivation as a judge.

The Awards Committee

The ability for a single judge to sway the votes of others came to an end in 1944 when Deacon submitted a resolution at the annual meeting of the CAA suggesting that an Awards Committee should be created, with a chairman and four other members, which would assume full responsibility for the award system. This committee would operate at arm's length from the National Executive of the CAA, and would have final authority on all issues relating to the awards. The resolution passed, and the National Executive appointed Deacon as the first chairman of the committee. This Awards Committee ran the GG awards until the Canada Council took control in 1959.

As Chairman, Deacon now had the formal power to implement his ideology of what type of books, and authors, should win the award. This

was done by overhauling the judging system and adopting a more stringent definition of what the *best* book looked like. Prior to the establishment of the Awards Committee, the National Executive had adopted "certain recommendations for the guidance of judges in future competitions" ("History of the Governor General's," n. pag.), although it is neither clear what those recommendations were, nor is there evidence that they were closely followed. After the Awards Committee was established, however, Deacon quickly made changes to remove some of the subjectivity in judging. In summarizing the history of the Awards Board, Franklin McDowell explains that Deacon first established nuanced criteria for determining a winning book, which began by noting, "Books shall be judged for their literary qualities" (n. pag.). However, the criteria also reminded judges that the public would read the winning books, and that this fact should be kept in mind when choosing the winner; at the same time, judges were warned not to award a book simply "for mere popularity" (n. pag.). Secondly, Deacon adopted a point system that required judges to rank the books in first, second, and third place. As well, judges were no longer allowed to converse amongst themselves to determine the winner. To ensure this, judges were not told who else was acting as a judge. In summary, the judging seemed to shift from subjective considerations towards a more objective points-based system.

Although Deacon's 1940s point system appears to counter his 1930s arguments praising the subjective nature of the awards, the change became necessary because Deacon, and other members of the CAA, felt that the "wrong" books were too frequently winning. While specific titles deemed "wrong" were not named, it is clear from the correspondence that the CAA was disappointed that works of highbrow literature were winning, as they failed to garner large sales and were not widely read by the general public. The new point system, however, did not completely eradicate this problem, and it became more difficult for Deacon to support specific books that satisfied his ideal. Deacon's loosening grip is fully evident in the correspondence around the fiction award for 1946. On April 8, 1947, Ira Dilworth sent a telegram to Deacon with his rankings for the best books in the fiction category. He placed Selwyn Dewdney's *Wind Without Rain* in first place, Edward F. Meade's *Remember Me* in second, and Ralph Allen's *Home Made Banners* in third. He noted, however, that he had not quite finished reading *Home Made Banners* (Letter to Deacon, 8 Apr. 1947). The other two judges in the category—Joseph Lister Rutledge and Charles Jennings[4]—had already submitted their choices, so Deacon calculated the scoring of each

book. The result based on the point system was that Mazo de la Roche's *Return to Jalna* had won.

The next day, on April 9, Deacon sent de la Roche a letter notifying her of her win, stating that "the award system is strengthened by the selection of a novel by Canada's most famous and successful writer of fiction" (Letter to Mazo de la Roche). In his correspondence, it is clear that Deacon was sincere in these comments, and that he felt de la Roche was an ideal winner of the award. On April 10, however, Ira Dilworth sent Deacon his "final judgment" (Letter to Deacon, 10 Apr. 1947), which now placed Winifred Bambrick's *Continental Review* in second place. This change necessitated a recalculation of the points, which resulted in Bambrick's novel passing de la Roche's.

As a result, the award for fiction for 1946 went to Bambrick. De la Roche, understandably, took the loss fairly hard. As her biographer Ronald Hambleton explains, "During the forties one of the judges [of the GG awards], in a lamentable lapse of taste, told Mazo de la Roche that she had won the award that year, but the final vote gave it to another author" (55). Hambleton notes that "[s]he regretted the loss deeply," and suggests that it "certainly contributed to her decision to leave Canada and make her home abroad" (55). Although his desire to notify de la Roche had serious consequences, this incident speaks to Deacon's commitment to the point system. He accepted the judges' rankings, even if it meant embarrassing himself and hurting an author he highly respected—one who fulfilled his criteria of writing good popular fiction.

Although the point system reduced the ability for individual judges to extend their influence in favour of a particular book, Deacon was still able to influence the award system as a whole. As Chairman of the Awards Committee, Deacon was responsible for sending each of the judges a letter to thank them and explain their role. This allowed Deacon to continue to influence the awards while maintaining the outward appearance—through the point system—that he was preventing interference with the judging process. These were not form letters, but personalized for each judge. As such, they offer a further insight into Deacon's conception of the awards. They occasionally speak to the purposes for the awards, as Deacon understood them, which were two-fold: to serve both the author and the public. As Deacon notes: "We are trying to serve the authors by throwing an annual spot-light on the best book in each division, and to serve the public by indicating the best Canadian reading matter" (Letter to Dilworth). Imbedded behind this "service" to the public is Deacon's awareness of the

power of prizes. Only a decade after the GG awards' creation, Deacon is acutely aware of the both the symbolic and economic capital that authors accrue from winning:

> the inception of this award system was an effort to do something to assist authors . . . While we could not give money that we did not have, we could ensure publicity for a limited group of titles annually with the result of inducing people to purchase copies and thus increase royalties and enhance the author's reputation, which is his capital. (Letter to Clay)

Deacon's goal of economic viability for authors by increasing reputations and subsequent sales can be seen in embryo in his early articulation of the award system; when deciding between Gibbon and Wrong, he discounted Wrong for being "comparatively wealthy." Deacon also sees the awards as being of service to all Canadian authors, for as he notes, "in a mild way, we are establishing standards for writers. Other writers will be influenced in their aims by the kind of book [the judges] select" (Letter to Judges in Fiction Division). The implied inverse of this, of course, is that if certain types of books did not win the award, authors might be inclined to avoid writing in that style or genre. In the end, Deacon was using the awards to support his view of authorship, shared by the CAA, which desired all Canadian authors to be able to earn a living from their writing, and have their books read by a wide audience.

Another thing that becomes evident in his letters to the judges is that Deacon had a very clear idea of who the ideal reader of Canadian literature was, or at least how he conceived of this ideal reader. This "John Public" is the average person—noticeably male—"an ordinary, intelligent reader," "a man of fair intelligence and reasonable taste. He is half-way between the infants who read comics and the Ph.D.'s" (Letter to Dilworth; Letter to Phelps). Accordingly, Deacon often describes what the ideal winning book should, and should not, be:

> We want a good, sensible, broad interpretation of "best book"—not an academic appraisal . . . It must be both good and suited to the popular taste. . . . Don't choose a very slight thing, no matter how excellent; don't choose what only Ph.D's will relish. Which one ought the bulk of Canadians to read if they knew about it? (Letter to Dilworth)

In this conception, Deacon advocates for the middle ground between highbrow and lowbrow literature. In particular, Deacon is concerned with supporting books that will actually be read by Canadians, as the reading of Canadian books, Deacon hoped, would produce support for more Canadian

literature. The awards, however, are not simply meant to reward current popular fiction. Deacon's depiction of the ideal book was not standardized, and as a result, while many of the letters received by the judges shared similarities, no two letters contained the exact same description. Although they are at times malleable, Deacon's instructions to the judges are consistent in their dismissal of highbrow literature and in their support for books with the potential to be commercial successes.

Advice to Judges

Deacon was acutely aware of the different ways that the prizes could be used to benefit the CAA in shaping the public's understanding and appreciation of Canadian literature. As English notes, literary prizes "provide[] an institutional basis for exercising, or attempting to exercise, control over the cultural economy, over the distribution of esteem and reward on a particular cultural field" (51). It is this control over the contested, and emerging, field of Canadian literature that Deacon was attempting to harness through the GG awards. Aside from attempting to ensure that a specific type of literature was consecrated, Deacon also wanted to ensure that the greatest number of different authors won the award. Arguably, if the same limited number of authors continued to win the awards, it would defeat the awards' purpose of drawing attention to new Canadian authors. As such, Deacon attempted to prevent authors from winning the awards more than once.

Accordingly, when Deacon sent his instructions on how to pick "the best book," he commonly included advice on which of the year's books the judges could disregard. His letters were often prefaced with qualifications, such as "[I] have no business to discuss merits with you" (Letter to Cox), or "Without wishing to influence your decision" (Letter to Calhoun), which are then immediately followed by pointed advice. For example, writing to Alexander Calhoun, a judge in the poetry category for 1946, Deacon explains that E. J. Pratt had already won the award twice, and would refuse the award if he won again. Deacon continued, noting "we feel that we are encouraging Canadian writers more by honoring new talent than repeating awards to the same people. For example, Birney, Marriott, Bourinot, have each had one medal. Consequently, if you are hesitating between one of these and some other . . . I suggest you lean towards the new work" (Letter to Calhoun). In this advice, however, Deacon is presenting his personal opinions about the award, as the CAA had never made a policy against authors winning more than once. This goal of the award—of placing recognition on a *new*

Canadian author every year—was complicated by the awards' focus on rewarding literary merit, as the best authors might easily continue to write well and might merit further attention. Despite these potentially conflicting objectives, Deacon continued to influence the judging so that the awards were consistently awarded to new authors, which, Deacon hoped, would spread public awareness of more Canadian authors.

The judges, however, did not always follow Deacon's unsolicited advice. In 1946, for example, Earle Birney won for his book of poetry, *Now is Time*, despite having won the award four years earlier for *David and Other Poems*. Interestingly, in response to the win, Birney wrote to Deacon, noting: "I feel somewhat embarrassed about the award, as I think that it would be a good thing if a previous winner were automatically disbarred in order that newer writers would get a chance. What do you think?" (Letter to Deacon, 26 Mar. 1946). Birney's unsolicited letter suggests that other Canadian authors shared Deacon's opinion that the awards should be spread around, although it might also be false modesty. Deacon explains to Birney that "[g]etting the medal before did weigh against you this time. You won in spite of that limitation. You see, we do consider these extraneous points where some equality exists and no critical misjustice is done" (Letter to Birney, 29 Mar. 1946).

Deacon was unable to completely control which authors won the GG awards, even when he was the Chairman of the Awards Committee. Authors and their works that did not meet Deacon's conservative ideal still won, such as E. J. Pratt, Earle Birney, and A. J. M. Smith. Despite this, it is evident that Deacon's attempt to direct the judging of the awards in a specific direction—one that praised the popular writing and rejected an academic form—was a powerful force. As such, Deacon belongs to what Carole Gerson has called the "invisible college" (47) of men that controlled the Canadian canon in the first half of the twentieth century. Gerson argues that between 1918 and the 1940s, "the canon of English-language Canadian literature was particularly arbitrary and malleable, governed less by cultural consensus than by the whims and agendas of certain individuals in positions of power" (47). These individuals were men, both nationalists and modernists, who "determined who and what got into print and into anthologies, and which works received prizes and plaudits" (47). Deacon was a successful member of this "invisible college," using his power as both the literary editor at the *Globe and Mail* and as judge and Chairman of the Awards Committee for the GG awards to consecrate authors whose writing supported his view of literature, while penalizing those whose writing did not.

Deacon had a clear vision for the awards: they should bring attention to Canadian literature and financially support Canadian authors. In this, Deacon was supporting the CAA's purpose in creating the awards, which was to improve the conditions of Canadian authors, at a time when it was often disadvantageous for authors to publish in Canada and when Canadian literature, as a category, was still contested. As such, prize culture motivated by a kind of literary nationalism in Canada was particularly important during the first two decades of the GG awards' existence, as the CAA was attempting to bring attention to Canadian literature, and argue that it was worth reading. However, most of the books that won the GG awards in the first two decades failed to become canonized in the subsequent decades, and most are now out of print. This failure suggests that the criteria Deacon used to pick winning books was limited, in that it satisfied the needs of the historical moment in supporting the writing of Canadian literature, but failed to properly consecrate these books with lasting importance. And it is the authors that failed to meet Deacon's criteria, and yet who still won, such as Pratt, Birney, and Smith, whose work has become canonized. Therefore, despite Deacon's power and the paternalistic role that he played in influencing the judging of Canada's first national literary award, his vision of Canadian literature was eventually eclipsed, often by the very writers that he had attempted to exclude.

NOTES

1 One of the best examples of this debate took place in 1924 between Robert Stead, president of the CAA, and an unnamed editor at the *Manitoba Free Press*. Over a month of back-and-forth letters, the two writers argued about the proper relationship between a writer and the marketplace. Stead argued that books should be viewed as commodities, with writers entitled to earn a living wage from their writing. The editor of the *Free Press* felt that Stead's view was "simply grotesque" ("Mr. Stead's Theory" 8) and argued that writers should be concerned with literary excellence and not the marketplace.

2 For further discussion of the role of literary celebrity in Canada, see Joel Deshaye's *The Metaphor of Celebrity*, which focuses on Canadian poets who explicitly engage with the idea of celebrity. For further examples of the numerous ways that Canadian cultural institutions have embraced and employed prestige in its various forms, see Maria Tippett's *Making Culture*, which focuses on culture in the first half of the twentieth century, and George Woodcock's *Strange Bedfellows*, which focuses on culture in Canada after the Massey Commission.

3 Unlike the contemporary Governor General's Literary Awards, for the first decades of the awards' existence there was no short list or long list of titles. Instead, the judges reviewed all books published in the category in the previous year. As such, the books under

consideration for the GG awards in these decades are a good indicator of the output of Canadian literature in a single year.

4 Joseph Lister Rutledge had placed Constance Beresford-Howe's *The Unreasoning Heart* in first place, Mazo de la Roche's *Return to Jalna* in second place, and Winifred Bambrick's *Continental Review* in third place. Charles Jennings had placed *Continental Review* in first place, *Return to Jalna* in second place, and Joyce Marshall's *Presently Tomorrow* in third place.

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