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Todd Spires
Bradley University

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Major Literary Award Winners in the Medium-Sized Academic Library

Todd Spires, Collection Development Librarian
Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, USA
tspires@bradley.edu

Abstract

This article addresses the role of major literary award-winning books and authors in the medium-sized academic library. It details a study performed at Bradley University's Cullom-Davis Library in early 2006. The project surveyed award-winning books held by the library at the time of the study. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate past selection performance of these materials, to provide data on items that the library needs to acquire and to encourage library faculty to watch for and make use of literary and other prize winning materials. The article describes the thought-process involved, the actual workflow and the results.

Introduction

There are a lot of literary prizes given to authors and their works each year. The 2005 *Bowker Annual* lists 104 awards of all types for adult readers (Bowker, 2005). Some are given for fiction, some are given for non-fiction and some, like the "National Book Awards," are given for both. There are prizes established to reward authors of specific genres of literature, such as the "Edgar Award" for mystery writers or the "Hugo Awards" for science fiction writers. There are prizes specific to women writers, gay and/or lesbian writers, black writers, Jewish writers and so on. Some are given to first-time authors only, such as the "Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Awards." Lastly, there are the regional prizes, such as the "California Book Awards," which are given to honor books written by residents of California or the "Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize" which honors a Canadian novel or collection of short stories. Many academic librarians collect prize winning books for their collections. This article describes a project undertaken at Bradley University's Cullom-Davis Library which explored the state of "major" literary award-winning

books within the library's collection. It describes the intent and scope of the project, the process undertaken and the results.

Bradley University has an interesting history. It is often classified as a medium-sized, private, liberal-arts university, although that would belie its roots as a school of horology or watch-making. Bradley Polytechnic Institute was founded in 1896 and became Bradley University in 1946 with the creation of a graduate school (Bradley Founding, 2006). It has continued to grow over the years and as of the fall 2005 semester Bradley had over 5,300 undergraduate students and 785 graduate students. In addition to 100 undergraduate programs of study, the school awards fourteen graduate degrees and a doctorate in physical therapy (Bradley Facts, 2006). The majority of our students are in the liberal arts, but our highly-respected engineering departments and education departments are growing very quickly.

The library plays an integral role on campus. The staff is small with eight full-time and two part-time reference librarians. The library holds approximately 435,000 book and bound volumes. We currently have approximately 1,500 serials subscriptions including standing orders. We benefit greatly from our participation in the CARLI Consortium. We have an impressive selection of electronic databases and electronic journal packages that most libraries of our size cannot afford. Like many other libraries, our book collection has suffered over the past 25 years.

Intent and Scope of Project

This project was undertaken as part of an overall collection assessment involving collection statistics such as item counts, circulation counts and browsing statistics. Other evaluation methods have been completed as well, such as a study of our holdings of recent *Choice* "Outstanding Academic Titles" (Outstanding, 2006). We hope to add survey data and other information to the assessment over time. We do not consider the literary prize section of the assessment as one of the more important parts of the study, but the results were interesting. Other libraries could benefit from similar studies. As stated above, we wanted to observe the state of major literary award-winning authors and books within our collection. This was designed to provide library selectors with more information about our holdings in prize-winning books. In addition, we hoped to increase our holdings in modern literature by filling in gaps with new purchases.

Major literary prizes tend to be given to authors and books produced for the reading public, not necessarily the academic library market. The best-known prizes in this country are the "Nobel Prize" (Nobel Foundation, 2006), "The Pulitzer Prize" (Pulitzer, 2006) and the "National Book Award" (National Book Foundation, 2006). They are nationally known and generally very well respected. These are the three

prizes with which we began our study. Most of these are high-quality titles written by the best authors of the modern age. For example, winners of the “Nobel Prize” have included such literary luminaries as Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemingway and more recently V.S. Naipaul (Nobel Foundation, 2006). Three past winners of the “Pulitzer Prize” are Alice Walker, John Updike and Eudora Welty (Pulitzer, 2006). The “National Book Award” has been in existence since 1950. Winners have included many important literary figures such as William Faulkner, Philip Roth and Joyce Carol Oates (National Book Foundation, 2006). We felt that our library, as well as most academic libraries, should possess the majority of these authors/titles in their collections.

In addition, we felt that we needed to research more than those three so we selected two more. We felt that it was appropriate for our library to maintain a collection of modern British literature, so we included the “Man Booker Prize” in the project. Past winners of this prize include Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie and Iris Murdoch (Booker Prize Foundation, 2006). We also felt that the “National Book Critics Circle Awards” was appropriate for the project. There were different titles and authors who had won this prize as compared to the three listed above. Winners of this award include Adrienne Rich, Stephen Jay Gould, Frank McCourt and John Updike. Other libraries may want to include different prizes if they undertake this sort of project. Each library’s collection is different. The *Bowker Annual* is a good place to start (Bowker, 2005).

From a statistical standpoint, the data below shows how aware Cullom-Davis Library selectors (librarians and faculty) have been over the years to major literary prize winners. However, this project was not intended as a means of measuring past selection performance, nor are the results a barometer of collection quality. The samples were too small for this to be the case. These books do stand up as a standard of quality in literature and non-fiction. Theoretically, the more of these items we have in our collection, the better it will be in the long run. Lastly, it provides us with information needed to fill in our collection gaps. Numerous titles were purchases as a result of this project.

Process

With the exception of the “Nobel Prize” which is awarded to an individual instead of a specific title, the process for each prize was the same. We printed out the award-winning books lists, including nominees, from the each prizes’ website. Next, each title was checked against our online catalog. The results of which were input into a spreadsheet which we used to determine ownership percentages, etc. Lastly, where there were gaps and if the title was still appropriate to the collection, we placed orders for the items. The section below on the “Nobel Prize” provides more information on

how this list was checked. The results are listed below for each award and summarized at the end of the article.

“Nobel Prize for Literature Laureates,” 1901-2005

This is the most highly regarded prize in literature, dating back to 1901. It is given to individual authors from all over the world (Nobel Foundation, 2006). Book titles are not listed. The prize is given to an author. Since we had no real means of comparison to determine percentages of titles held etc., we counted holdings related to each laureate. We searched each author in the online catalog, counting holdings of the following; the number of items authored by each laureate that we held, the number of publications about each author that we held and the number of collections in which each author had a story, poem, play etc. published in that we held. These were listed as separate columns in the spreadsheet. The last column expressed the total. The numbers show how well we have collected these authors over the years.

Items authored by the laureates included novels, collections of stories, collections of plays, individual plays, collections of poems, non-fiction works, collections of essays, musical works and collections of letters. Books about authors included criticism, biographies and bibliographies. Lastly, collections included individual short stories, poems, plays, essays etc. published in a collection of several authors' works. We also counted occasions where an author introduced a book or had written a preface. In addition, we counted occasions when an author's work had been turned into a work of music or produced as a film. The results were very interesting. We expected us to have decent holdings for U.S. laureates. In general, with a few of exceptions, we did. See below:

1993	Toni Morrison	33
1987	Joseph Brodsky	3
1978	Isaac Singer	19
1976	Saul Bellow	41
1962	John Steinbeck	66
1954	Ernest Hemingway	111
1949	William Faulkner	172
1938	Pearl S. Buck	21
1936	Eugene O'Neill	89
1930	Sinclair Lewis	47

We decided that it was important to our library that to own these authors' major works and a good selection of criticism. For a library our size, we felt we had good holdings for Faulkner, Hemingway, O'Neill and Morrison. We had adequate holdings for

Lewis, Bellow and Steinbeck. Our holdings for Brodsky, Singer, and Buck were too low. To verify, we compared our holdings to the University of Illinois' library. Our presumption was that they would have much larger holdings for these authors. Their online catalog showed many more holdings. For example, they owned fifty-seven items authored by Brodsky compared to our eight. They owned ninety items authored by Singer compared to our fourteen. Lastly, they own 127 items authored by Buck, while Bradley had sixteen. As a result of this study, we purchased more titles by and about these authors. We also boosted our holdings Lewis, Bellow and Steinbeck.

There are numerous well-respected authors from the United Kingdom and other countries who have won the "Nobel Prize." Does Bradley University need to have all of the books written by these individuals? Additionally, if they are being taught in our Foreign Languages Department, do we need to obtain the materials in their original language? We pinpointed several authors we should have decent holdings for. They are:

2005	Harold Pinter (UK)	38
2001	V.S. Naipaul (UK)	18
1999	Gunter Grass (Germany)	29
1995	Seamus Heaney (Ire)	22
1990	Octavio Paz (Mexico)	25
1989	Camilo Jose Cela (Spain)	26
1983	William Golding (UK)	15
1982	Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Col)	39
1972	Heinrich Boll (Germany)	30
1971	Pablo Neruda (Chile)	35
1970	Alexander Solzhenitsyn (USSR)	30
1969	Samuel Beckett (Ire)	77
1964	Jean-Paul Sartre (France)	116
1958	Boris Pasternak (USSR)	21
1957	Albert Camus (France)	50
1953	Winston Churchill (UK)	80
1950	Bertrand Russell (UK)	94
1948	TS Eliot (UK)	147
1929	Thomas Mann (Germany)	98
1925	George Bernard Shaw (UK)	143
1923	William Butler Yeats (Ire)	166
1907	Rudyard Kipling (UK)	84

We felt that these were very good holdings for a library of our size. We ordered some materials to fill in gaps, especially with some of the newer authors. Also, it was determined that we would continue to purchase new publications by these authors if they are alive and publishing new works.

We are monitoring the remainder of the authors on the list to see if there is a jump in interest in them on campus or in general. Unless there is a sudden increase in their popularity or a course is developed on campus which highlights a particular author's writings, we will not be purchasing many items for the rest of the foreign Nobel laureates. We felt that we had done a good job of collecting books by and about these award-winning authors over the years. We will continue to purchase the materials of winners each year.

“Pulitzer Prize for Letters and Drama,” 1965-2004

In addition to being the most prestigious award for journalists, “The Pulitzer Prize” is one of the most highly regarded annual awards for book titles. They began awarding the best fiction prize in 1965. In 1986, they added awards for “non-fiction,” “biography,” “history,” “drama” and “poetry.” A lot of the recent winners, especially in fiction, have been relatively unknown at the time of the award but have grown in stature as a result of winning it. Using we checked the lists in our online catalog, we determined that we had these prize-winning books in the following percentages.

Category	# of Titles	# BU Holds	% Held
Fiction	37	24	64.9%
Non-Fiction	19	18	94.7%
Biography	19	14	73.7%
History	19	15	78.9%
Drama	17	15	88.2%
Poetry	19	9	47.4%
Totals	130	95	73.1%

Our opinion was that an academic library our size should have most of these items, if not all. Some of the most important and influential works of our time have won it. Winners include Alice Walker, John Updike, Toni Morrison, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty. It was evident from the data that a concentrated effort had been made to collect these titles in the late 1990s. We held all of the items in all categories. For the other years, it was hit or miss. Odds are a library selector placed a request without realizing it has won the prize. The fact that we had

73.1% of the titles was considered a sign that we had done a decent job of obtaining them over the years. We ordered as many of the others as we could to fill in gaps, however many were out-of-print. We now have 115 out of the 130 titles or 88.5%. The years 2005 and 2006 were left out of the study because we had already purchased the materials once they won the award and before we began this study. It did not improve the results to include them.

“National Book Awards”

These annual awards are given by the National Book Foundation. According to their website (<http://www.nationalbook.org/>), the goal of the awards is to “enhance the public's awareness of exceptional books written by fellow Americans, and to increase the popularity of reading in general” (National Book Foundation, 2006). The awards are currently given to recognize achievements in four categories; “fiction,” “non-fiction,” “poetry,” and “young people's literature.” In the past, awards have been given in the other categories such as autobiography (hardcover and paperback), biography (hardcover and paperback), “current interest,” “first novel” and “general reference books” (hardcover and paperback), to name but a few. There were no awards given for poetry between 1983 and 1991. In addition, awards were not given for “young people’s literature” between 1983 and 1996.

Dating back to 1950, this was the most time-consuming list to check. The National Book Foundation website listed winners and nominees dating back its beginning. There were some years where the nominees were not announced, so we had only a few titles to check. In other years, where there were up to eighteen nominees in a single category. We checked every single title listed on their website. We included the children’s materials because we do have a Curriculum Materials Center serving the needs of our education students and faculty. In our mind, this is the third most important literary award of the year behind the “Pulitzer Prize” and the “Nobel Prize.”

Instead of monitoring each of the numerous categories used by the National Book Foundation over the years, such as “History” for example, we consolidated like categories in four broad ones. They were “fiction,” “non-fiction,” “poetry,” and “young people’s literature.” This means that some years there were more than one winner in a category. For example, in 1980 there were fifteen prize winning non-fiction books. From 1950 to 2005, 125 books won various awards under the broad category of non-fiction. The totals for each category are as follows:

Category	# of Titles	# BU Holds	% Held All	% Held Winners
Fiction	255	110	43.1%	60.7%

Non-Fiction	370	247	66.8%	76.8%
Poetry	180	66	36.7%	76.0%
Young People's Lit.	90	32	35.6%	42.4%
Totals:	805	423	52.5%	68%

In the years prior to 1989, our holdings were patchy, but in the years since we had a very high percentage of the items. We did not think that the fact that we did not own every prize-winning novel and book of poetry in the 1950s and 1960s was a big issue. Many of the authors are relatively unknown now. For example, in 1953 Isabel Bolton, H.L. Davis, Thomas Gallagher and Peter Martin were nominated along with the winner Ralph Ellison, for *Invisible Man*, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. Thankfully, we had the works by Ellison, Hemingway and Steinbeck. However, there were occasions where we were missing important works, such as *A Fable* by William Faulkner which won the “National Book Award” for “fiction” in 1955. With regards to non-fiction works, we had a high percentage of these going back into the 1950s. These were important titles for our collection as well. Quite but a few of the older items were still pertinent and had become important works over the years. Williams’ *Lincoln Finds a General* and Catton’s *A Stillness at Appotmattox* are two examples. On those occasions where a title was still available for purchase and we felt it was still timely and appropriate, we placed orders for it. We ordered ninety-seven items to fill in these gaps.

“Man Booker Prize”

The “Man Booker Prize,” also known as the “Booker Prize” is a literary award given by Booker McConnell, a British “multinational conglomerate company.” It has been administered by the Book Trust in the United Kingdom since 1969. It is awarded to the “best full-length novel written in English by a citizen of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, Eire, Pakistan or South Africa.” This makes for an interesting mix of titles, a good number of which we wanted to see in our collection. We checked all of the nominees and the winners. The table below shows the overall percentage we held. In the lower left-hand column, it shows the percentage of the award winners we own. Here are the results broken down year by year:

Year	# of Titles	# BU Holds	% Held	Winner?
2003	6	3	50%	Yes
2002	6	3	50%	Yes
2001	6	3	50%	Yes
2000	6	2	33.3%	Yes

1999	6	6	100%	Yes
1998	6	6	100%	Yes
1997	6	6	100%	Yes
1996	6	6	100%	Yes
1995	5	1	20%	No
1994	6	0	0%	No
1993	6	1	16.7%	No
1992	6	0	0%	No
1991	6	0	0%	No
1990	6	1	16.7%	No
1989	6	2	33.3%	Yes
1988	6	2	33.3%	No
1987	6	2	33.3%	Yes
1986	6	2	33.3%	No
1985	6	2	33.3%	No
1984	6	0	0%	No
1983	6	0	0%	No
1982	6	1	16.7%	No
1981	6	0	0%	No
1980	6	1	16.7%	No
1979	5	1	20%	No
1978	6	2	33.3%	Yes
1977	6	1	16.7%	No
1976	6	0	0%	No
1975	2	0	0%	No
1974	5	1	20%	No
1973	4	1	25%	No
1972	4	0	0%	No
1971	6	1	16.7%	No
1970	6	2	33.3%	No
1969	6	1	16.7%	No
Totals	199	60	30.2%	31.4%

On the surface, these results may have appeared to be insufficient. However, looking at the titles we felt that they were fine. Many of the nominees were authors who had slipped into obscurity over the years, at least in the United States. In general, there is not a substantial emphasis on modern British literature at Bradley, so these numbers were more than acceptable. We ordered thirty-five items which we felt we needed. The years 2004 and 2005 were not included in the study because we had already purchased the materials upon hearing they won the awards and before we began this study.

“National Book Critics Circle Award”

The “National Book Critics Circle Awards” has been around since 1981. The prizes are generated by the input of more than 700 reviewers in the United States. In the beginning, it awarded the best books in “fiction,” “general non-fiction” and “poetry.” In 1983, “biography/autobiography” was added as a category. Lastly, “criticism” was added in 1995 (National Book Critics Circle, 2006). Of the five prizes we studied, we felt this prize was slightly less important than the others. Despite this, the titles were very interesting and were in subject areas we collect. We included nominees along with the winners in this study. The table below reflects the percentage of nominees and award winners that we held.

Category	# of Titles	# BU Holds	% Held	% of Winners Held
Fiction	64	32	50%	50%
Non-Fiction	64	38	59.4%	58.3%
Biography/Auto.	58	29	50%	54.5%
Poetry	60	22	36.7%	41.7%
Criticism	46	24	52.2%	40%
Totals:	232	123	53%	53.8%

The quality of the selections in the “National Book Critic Circle Award” categories is very good. Plus, the winners of these awards varied quite a bit from the other three American prizes. Due to this, we ordered seventy-nine additional titles from this list.

Conclusion

Excluding the “Nobel Prize” winners, as of May 2006, we held 51.3% of all of the books in the project (see table below). This may appear to be a low percentage, but if we remove the British award, the “Man Booker Prize” from the calculation, the

numbers improve to 54.9%. Our presumption was that we would have the highest percentage of titles for the “Pulitzer Prize,” since it has been around for a long time and has been well-publicized over the years. We were correct. In addition, we had a high percentage of the “National Book Awards” nominees and winners, at least for the past twenty years or so. We were missing a lot of the older material, but tried to remedy that were appropriate. This coincides with the increased exposure of the award in the past couple of decades. Here are the overall figures:

All - Winners and Nominees			
Prize	# of Titles	# BU Held	% Held
Pulitzer	130	95	73.1%
NBA	805	423	52.5%
Man Booker	199	60	31.4
NBCCA	232	123	53.8%
Totals:	1,366	701	51.3%

If all of the items we ordered as a result of this project arrive in the library, our percentage will increase to 67.5% for all four awards and to 70.9% for the American prizes. From now on, we plan to purchase all of the winners and nominees for these four awards. We will also continue to increase our collections for “Nobel Prize” laureates.

If we exclude nominees and focus on the winners, our percentage increased to 64.4% (see table below). When we removed the “Man Booker Prize,” we held 66.7% of these prize-winning books. However, if every item we ordered arrives, we will have 87.7% of these award-winning books in our collections, including the “Man Booker Prize.” Here are the results for winners only:

Winners			
Prize	# of Titles	# BU Held	% Held
Pulitzer	130	95	73.1%
NBA	297	202	68%
Man Booker	36	11	31.4%
NBCCA	93	50	53.8%
Totals:	556	358	64.4%

Although these results did not provide an overall view of the quality the library's collections, the figures were interesting. The end result was a realization that we had done a good job of collecting these titles over the years, but that we could do better. One of the results of the survey was a report presented to the library faculty which described how we had done in the past and encouraged selectors to pay attention to award winning books in their subject areas in the future. In addition, we drastically improved the percentage of prize-winning titles in our collection by purchasing those that we did not hold. Our project goals were met and the library's collection improved as a result.

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