

Carleton University
Winter 2025 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 4135B: *Studies in Publishing*
The Rise of the Prize in Contemporary Literary Culture

Prerequisites: fourth-year standing or permission of the department

Instructor: Prof. Jody Mason
Email: jody.mason@carleton.ca

***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

I. Course description:

Everyone loves a prizewinning book! We choose prizewinners from digital and actual bookstore shelves; we turn to prize lists for reading ideas; we tune in when social media tells us that a new prize has been announced or when a prizewinning author comes to a local writers' festival.

The literary prize is a crucial feature of contemporary publishing. An instrument of consecration, it shapes what we read and how we read. Literary prizes have a long history, but their ubiquity in literary culture was cemented alongside the rise of what publishing scholars call the “conglomerate era,” the processes of consolidation that, since about 1965, have led to the narrowing of ownership in English-language trade publishing. We'll study the work of historians and sociologists who have analyzed consolidation together with the work of theorists and literary critics who have sought to make sense of the functions of prizing in the contemporary literary field. In this seminar, we'll depart from two assumptions: 1. structures of ownership and conditions of publishing matter to literary culture, and 2. literary prizes do more than apprehend and consecrate self-evident literary value.

II. Learning Outcomes:

In this course we'll assess the history of the late twentieth-century emergence of conglomerate publishing. We'll learn to apply sociological, historical, and materialist methods to the analysis of contemporary fiction and the instrument of the literary prize.

III. Texts:

Course readings will feature historical, sociological, and literary critical scholarship on late twentieth- and twenty-first-century English-language trade publishing and the literary prize,

as well as a selection of prized literary texts (with a focus on English-language fiction, given its ubiquity in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary prizing, and with a particular focus on texts that have won major literary awards in Canada and on the 2024 shortlist of the Scotiabank Giller Prize).

IV. Evaluation:

Seminar Facilitation (25%)

Seminar Activities and Participation (25%)

Reading Response x 2 (7.5% x 2)

Proposal + Research Essay (5% + 30%)