

Winner Does Not Take All

A fancy literary prize like this month's Pulitzer can boost book sales. Or not
by Miriam Datskovsky

OF THE DOZENS OF literary awards bestowed each year, the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, handed out this month, is one of the most coveted. The award translates into better placement at bookstores, fatter advances, expedited editions of a paperback, and as an added bonus, a \$10,000 check. But when it comes to improving book sales, does the Pulitzer reign supreme?

Not always. The most recognized English-language literary awards can be counted on one hand: the Pulitzer, the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner, and Britain's Man Booker. But looking at the three most recent years for which comparable sales data is available, the book that won the Pulitzer had the biggest sales boost just once. That was in 2002, when the award was given to Richard Russo's *Empire Falls*. In the following

month, the sales jump was impressive: 6,500 percent, to 99,000 copies, which dwarfed the competition.

No such luck since then. In 2006, the winner of the Pulitzer was *March*, by Geraldine Brooks. For the month following the award, its U.S. sales jumped 86 percent, according to Nielsen BookScan. The rise placed *March* third, well behind the lift given by the Booker Prize. Its winner, *The Inheritance of Loss*, by Kiran Desai, registered a U.S. sales rise of 625 percent. In 2003, the results were similar: The Pulitzer winner placed second, with a 200 percent jump, lagging behind the Booker winner, D.B.C. Pierre's *Vernon God Little*, which got a 677 percent boost.

Of course, because Booker winners are authors who are less well-known in the



U.S., it's a relative snap for them to post big U.S. sales jumps. It puts *Vernon God Little*'s boost in perspective when you consider that in the month before it won the Booker, it had sold only 1,000 copies in the U.S.

Regardless of sales data, few American authors would trade their Pulitzers for anything. Jane Smiley won hers in 1992 for *A Thousand Acres*. It enabled her to quit teach-

ing and move from Iowa to Hollywood. Plus, says Smiley, "it got me on the Huffington Post, since Arianna, when I met her, had never heard of me. But she had heard of the Pulitzer." ©

3. Jennifer Garner
The Elf on the Shelf: A Christmas Tradition
by Carol Aebersold and Chanda Bell
Sales spiked 300 percent, to **4,000 copies**, in the month after Garner was photographed carrying this children's book.

2. Paris Hilton
The Power of Now
by Eckhart Tolle
The week after the photos of Hilton holding this guide first appeared, one edition sold **3,000 copies**—a 50 percent increase over the previous week.

1. Drew Barrymore
Skinny Legs and All by Tom Robbins
In January, one edition of *Skinny Legs* sold **1,000 copies** in the U.S. That's about the same number it sold the week after Barrymore was photographed with the novel in February.

The Paparazzi Effect

There's nothing like a **celebrity photograph** to boost a book's sales



JACKSON LEE (BARRYMORE); JENNIFER BUHL (HILTON); MEJIA (GARNER)