Raymond Souster's *New Wave Canada*: A Bibliographical Note

Bruce Whiteman

MOST STUDENTS OF THE BOOK ARE ATTRACTED TO, AND TAUGHT VIA, THE intricacies of books published from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Bibliographical irregularities to a great extent decreased as book production became more and more mechanized, and it is not perhaps unfair to say that among descriptive bibliographers there is often a lack of interest in – if not a disdain for – twentieth-century books. To take the example of modern Canadian poetry, one may envision the production of a book of poems by McClelland and Stewart as an automated process from beginning to end, and one unlikely to produce books of much bibliographical interest. A vast number of books of Canadian poetry, however, are not produced in this fashion. I am referring to the products of the small presses – the vanity presses, the poets' presses, and the presses which exist as adjuncts to magazines (Island Press, Delta Canada, etc.). Much of this literature is ephemeral, but many of our best-known poets saw their first work appear under the imprint of one of these little presses, and not infrequently these books present interesting points and problems for the bibliographer.

A good example is the anthology of new and young poets which Raymond Souster edited and published in 1966 under the title *New Wave Canada: The New Explosion in Canadian Poetry*. The publishing history of this book is relatively well documented in a series of letters which Souster wrote to the American poet Cid Corman during the time that he was compiling the anthology. Briefly, the book began as a proposed Centennial project and was originally titled *Poets 67*. Once complete (it contained work by seventeen poets) the manuscript was submitted first to Ryerson Press and subsequently to McClelland and Stewart. Both publishers rejected it, so Souster decided to bring the book out at his own expense and under the imprint of his Contact Press. Contact Press had been founded in 1952 by Souster, Louis Dudek, and Irving Layton, and during the 1950s it was the most important small press in Canada. Peter Miller later replaced Dudek and Layton, but by the early 1960s the press was beginning to lose energy and direction. After *New Wave Canada* only two further titles would be published by Contact Press.

The printing of the anthology was to be done by Victor Coleman (one of the

poets), who had recently purchased an offset press. But Coleman landed a job at Oxford University Press before printing could begin, and the job devolved upon a friend – nominally the Rubicon Press. The press, it turned out, was located in an unheated building, and Souster was at his wit's end to force the printer to do his work (it was the coldest winter in twenty years). The sheets were finally delivered during the first week of May, and Souster and a number of friends spread them out in his basement on the backs of all the doors of his house, which had been removed for the purpose – 80 piles of 1,000 sheets – and in five days they were collated. According to Souster, 910 copies went to the binder, and the book was officially published on the 14th of May, 1966.¹

There are three distinct issues of *New Wave Canada* (none of which has priority), and of these the first two are relatively straightforward. If Souster's figure of 910 copies refers to the entire edition, then one may say that the paper issue comprises 736 copies which sold for \$3.00. The second issue consisted of 145 copies casebound in overprinted boards, signed by Souster, and numbered 1-145.² These sold originally for \$5.00. The third issue, strictly speaking, exhibits 29 separate states, because Souster bound into each of 29 copies several leaves from the individual poets' typescripts.³ Each of these copies, numbered 1-XXIX, was signed and dated by Souster. They sold for \$10.00, and the intention was to raise capital for the cost of printing *New Wave Canada*.⁴ They are bibliographically *sui generis* and present an unusual problem of classification.

The bibliographical history of this title is, however, not quite completed by the above description. Souster has said in conversation that 150 sets of sheets were given to the poet/publisher Nelson Ball and that these were later bound and issued as a 'second edition.' Nelson Ball has corroborated this. Of course, these copies are in no way distinguishable from the first edition and, in fact, form part of it despite their being issued at a later time. The question of where these 150 sets of sheets came from remains unresolved.⁵

By October of 1966 over 600 copies of *New Wave Canada* had been sold, and one may assume that the entire run was exhausted in less than a year. The book received a mixed reception, but it has now taken its place as a seminal anthology of the new Canadian poetry that sprung up in the 1960s. It is one example of the interesting problems which confront the bibliographer who enters the *terra incognita* of modern Canadian poetry.

NOTES

1. Most of the details in this paragraph were gleaned from Raymond Souster's letters to Cid Corman, now in the Harriet Irving Library at the University of New Brunswick. Copies of these letters were kindly supplied to me by Ms Mary Flagg of the Library.
2. A press release among Souster's papers at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, states that there were 150 copies in boards, but the books themselves confirm the lower figure.
3. A census of these 29 special copies is among the Souster papers at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.
4. An advertisement in the 6th issue of *Island* magazine shows that \$10.00 was the pre-publication price, \$12.50 after March 28, 1966. This ad is overprinted with the word 'sold' in large letters, and though *Island* 6 is undated, one of the letters from Souster to Corman shows that the magazine appeared sometime before July 2, 1966.
5. To complete the bibliographical history of *New Wave Canada*, mention should also be made of the 'Portfolio.' This was a sampler of a few of the poems from the anthology, handwritten and reproduced as a sixteen-page booklet with a cover-title. The 'Portfolio' was tipped into copies of issue no. 7/8 of *Island*, Victor Coleman's magazine.