Robert Lecker. *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*. Concord, Ont.: Anansi, 1995. xi, [1], 276 pp.; \$22.95 [paper]. ISBN 0-88784-566-5.

Despite the assertion that in the 1960s 'government, academia, and the publishing industry joined hands to create a national canon' (p. 26), Robert Lecker's *Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature* places its primary focus on the critical writings of Canadian literary academics rather than government cultural policy or the activities of Canadian publishers. It's disappointing not to find publishing accorded a more integral role in canon formation throughout this volume. Moreover, Lecker's emphasis on the academic institution and the period after 1960 is troubling if one considers editors, book reviewers, or academics of earlier generations as having been engaged in canonical activities.

Eight previously published and revised essays make up this book. They range from broadly conceived studies of canonization and its relation to English-Canadian literary criticism by academics, through examinations of particular activities, such as anthologies and a reprint series, to interpretive readings of Northrop Frye's Conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada* and Frank Davey's 'Surviving the Paraphrase.' The book's introduction and conclusion, 'Making It Real' and 'Making It Real (Again),' like its title, allude to Robert Kroetsch's contention that 'The fiction makes us real.' Affirming a belief in the creative aspect of critical acts of writing, Lecker argues: 'Kroetsch is right: in any number of ways, people involved in writing about Canadian writing keep trying to construct their country, to write it into existence, to make it real' (p. 6). While the essays focus upon past canonical activities and criticism, the introduction and conclusion exhibit concern for provoking discussion about the role of contemporary English-Canadian literary critics and their relation to English-Canadian literature, its teaching, and Canadian society.

The book's middle section, 'Canon-Making,' is of greatest interest to publishing historians. Nonetheless, those who turn to 'The Rhetoric of Back-Cover Copy: Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*' for deeper insight into the role of back-cover copy in a book's sale, promotion and reception will be discomfited. Changes in back-cover copy do form a rough frame for the article; however, Lecker's concern for texts generated by copywriters falls secondary to the compositions of reviewers and academics. The title obscures, rather than clarifies, the article's provocative argument that a book's move toward 'classic status' inevitably results in the work's erasure, the original text progressively subsumed by the critical apparatus that grows up around it and the representational values that become attached to it.

'Anthologizing English-Canadian Fiction: Some Canonical Trends' engages in a statistical study of the contents of sixty-five fiction anthologies issued between 1922 and 1992. Analysis of the data allows the author to tackle successfully two of his aims: determining the writers included most often and the rise and fall of literary reputations. The figures also support his point that the inclusion of specific authors often relates to their receiving literary honours or because of their

prior establishment as novelists. Absent is any quantitative analysis of various publishers' levels of activity in producing anthologies. Of particular significance is Lecker's acknowledgement that an important relation exists between permissions' costs and inclusions: 'Critics too often forget that publishing is a business in which selection and dissemination become functions of cost. These costs may have a profound effect on editorial direction, particularly in the case of anthologies, for which many permissions fees may need to be negotiated' (p. 116). His statement thus qualifies his results. Unfortunately, no archival evidence is offered to illustrate his point.

One applauds Lecker's determination in 'The New Canadian Library: A Classic Deal' to challenge 'the frequently made assumption that any canon . . . is the product of purely aesthetic concerns' (p. 159). However, his thesis that McClelland and Stewart's reprint series under Malcolm Ross's editorship was largely defined by commercial, rather than aesthetic, criteria is too categorical. The essay is marred in its research, its detail and its argumentation. Though the M&S papers at McMaster University Library and Ross's papers at Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library were consulted, no mention is made of Ross's papers at the University of Calgary, the collection containing the bulk of the editor's surviving NCL correspondence. Those papers might speak to the aesthetic issues the author finds lacking in the M&S files. In his essay Lecker mistakenly describes the NCL as a 'mass-market paperback' library (p. 154) when it was the first quality paperback series produced in Canada. Jarring too is his suggestion that the lack of previous study of the NCL indicates that it 'truly has achieved the high point of canonical status: it is a powerful collection of culturally relevant texts that has been accepted, institutionalized, utilized, studied, praised, and never once interrogated' (pp. 155-6). This statement denies the interrogations that have occurred in reviews of NCL titles or verbally among users of the series. In his argument, Lecker claims that in the series' early years financial constraints forced Ross to choose books in the public domain or ones that could be purchased cheaply, thus excluding contemporary works unless M&S held the rights. One must take this assertion on faith since no list of NCL titles is provided nor is there a breakdown indicating which of the 'early' titles were in the public domain, which were owned by M&S, and which were successfully or unsuccessfully sought from other publishers. The article as a whole is reticent about stating what was included in the series: Lecker notes that 168 titles had been published by 1978 but only about ten of these are mentioned. Disconcerting too is his unqualified linkage between a commercial imperative and the inclusion of titles suggested to M&S salesmen. If those salesmen were speaking to instructors of Canadian literature, should the weight placed upon economics and aesthetics be revised? Finally, while the cultural ferment of the 1950s is acknowledged, the series itself is not tied to shifts in the publishing, academic, and literary milieu in which it took shape. Lecker dints the mystique of the NCL in this essay, but there's certainly room for doubt about the substance of his evaluation.

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