William Collins During World War II: Nationalism Meets a Wartime Economy in Canadian Publishing

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In the early 1940s, Canadian publishing underwent profound changes, resulting from economic and cultural pressures related to Canada’s involvement in the Second World War. In particular, the rise of Canadian nationalism infiltrated the day-to-day business decisions of publishing to produce a curious blend of economy and extravagance in book production. We are accustomed to discussing nationalist themes within the content of literary works, and the ways that certain poems, songs, and novels embody the spirit of a particular nation at a particular time. The history of the Canadian branch of William Collins Sons and Company during the 1940s, however, suggests that nationalist themes spread beyond the words of texts and into the production of the physical texts themselves. Three sets of archival records shed light upon this prominent and influential publisher: those of Franklin Appleton, founder of Collins’s Canadian branch; of Grace Campbell, whose first two novels were published by Collins in 1942 and 1944; and of the Hunter Rose Company, one of three main printing companies in Toronto. Evidence from these sources suggests that trade publishing in English Canada underwent an explosive period of growth during the Second World War, a growth which strained the resources of Canadian printers and publishers as they struggled with severe paper and labour shortages. Despite these wartime constrictions, however, Collins under Appleton’s direction achieved remarkably high standards of book design, standards that were dictated not merely by aesthetic concerns but by a political and ideological response to Canada’s role in world events.

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This analysis draws on two familiar models of book production: Robert Darnton's "Communications Circuit" and Adams and Barker's "Socio-Economic Conjuncture." Both models show political, intellectual, economic, and social forces acting upon the cycle of publishing, from creation, through manufacture and distribution, to use and reception. Even more important, both models are founded on a two-way interaction between book and context. Books, Darnton argues, "do not merely recount history; they make it." Adams and Barker posit an "interplay between external forces and the various processes through which the book goes." When we look at the evidence of publishing at William Collins Sons and Company in Canada during the Second World War, we find that publishing influenced the social life of Canada, even as it was influenced by it.

From Book to Context: How Publishers Could Win the War

Let us begin with one pattern of influence. During World War II, Canada was passing through a period common to many nations, in which the everyday behaviour of its citizens and businesses had gathered intense significance in relation to international events. Early in 1942, the Junior Stationers' Guild in Toronto was treated to an impassioned speech by Norman E. Wainwright, Administrator of Converted Paper Products under the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. After defending the Board's unpopular imposition of price ceilings, he went on to define how Canadian businesses could affect the events occurring on the world stage:

Each of us is now regarded as a potential fighter or a potential producer. Unless we can contribute to the war effort through our services in the forces, through our work, through our money, or through our spirit, we have no economic justification for existence today.

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4 Darnton 111.
5 Adams and Barker 10.
Evidently, Wainwright failed to impress his baleful audience; *Quill and Quire* refused to publish the first half of the speech, denouncing it as mere “political diatribe.” Nonetheless, his statement indicates how deeply the war had infiltrated business activity and daily life in Canada. No decision, however minor, could be divorced from political and ideological concerns. Like the English during the 1790s, who became anxious that their slightest actions would manifest either their approval or their condemnation of the French Revolution, Canadians during the 1940s experienced a heightened self-consciousness about their lives and work, a sense that their small, individual actions could and would make a difference to the conflict overseas.

Trade book publishing in English Canada was doubly susceptible to this ideological self-consciousness. As a cultural and educational activity, publishing became a forum in which Canadian authors and readers could explore a resurgent nationalism and self-confidence. Grace Campbell articulated this nationalist mood in her speeches promoting her first novel, *Thorn-Apple Tree*, in 1942. “Let us,” she urged Canadians, “be aware of ourselves as a young, strong, hard, disciplined, spiritually-solvent people, cherishing our past, moulding our destiny with vigor and wisdom, fearing God and honoring our heroes, and stepping into the future unafraid.” As a business activity, however, publishing was expected to exercise patriotic restraint in its use of labour and natural resources. The surprising success of Canadian publishing as a cultural and nationalistic activity made such patriotic restraint all the more difficult. Patriotic constraints were imposed upon a business that was growing rapidly, far beyond the predictions of the pre-war years.

From Context to Book: Growth and Constriction in Canadian Publishing

The growth in Canadian publishing during World War II can be best understood by setting it against Morley Callaghan’s succinct
Figure 1 – Grace Campbell addresses the Women’s Canadian Club in Toronto, on November 26, 1942.
assessment of the depressing plight of Canadian writers a mere year before the war broke out: "It is practically impossible for [publishers] to sell a thousand copies of a novel by a Canadian in Canada.... At least two thousand copies of a novel must be sold before the publisher breaks even on it, which is a pretty good explanation of why Canadian novels are not published by Canadian publishers."\(^\text{10}\) Austin Cross, writing for *Canadian Business* in 1941, provides a roughly similar picture of a country whose scant population had little interest in works promoting a Canadian identity, and whose authors were unable to make Canadian themes commercially viable: "Any Canadian writer is delighted to sell 1,000 copies," he declares; "one well-known Canadian writer had to be content with seeing his novel go only as far as 250 copies sold."\(^\text{11}\)

The war created an entirely new demand for books in Canada, a demand inspired, according to *Quill and Quire*, by the fact that "more and more people [needed] the information books supply and [had] the money to pay for them."\(^\text{12}\) In its "Among Bookmen" column for August 1943, the *Quill* likened this change in publishing climate to the farcical scenario of a man pushing against a locked door, only to have it open suddenly, causing him to tumble down on the other side of the wall: "During the depression years, books, in the minds of publisher and bookseller alike, were a commodity to be pushed, and pushed hard. Came the war, and down tumbled the walls of sales resistance.... Nowadays, books are ridiculously easy to sell."\(^\text{13}\)

The experience of novelist Grace Campbell at William Collins provides a telling example of the new climate. Campbell was "discovered" by Franklin Appleton, a director at Collins in Toronto, who, at the urging of William Arthur Deacon, Literary Editor of the *Globe and Mail*, agreed to publish her first novel, *Thorn-Apple Tree*, an historical novel set in Glengarry, Ontario, at the turn of the nineteenth century, was launched by Collins in October of 1942. By the end of the year, nearly 20,000 copies had been sold, making it the bestseller of the year.\(^\text{14}\) Her second novel, *The Higher Hill*, also

\(^\text{10}\) Morley Callaghan, "The Plight of Canadian Fiction," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 7 (Jan. 1938): 159.
\(^\text{11}\) Austin Cross, "Too Little for Words?" *Canadian Business* 17 (Feb. 1944): 120, 118.
set in pioneer Glengarry, appeared in late 1944 with an initial print run of 10,000 copies. For a country whose authors had traditionally sought success south of the border, Grace Campbell’s association with Collins during the 1940s offered vivid proof that English Canada was capable of generating impressive sales on its own, of Canadian books that were written, published, printed, and promoted in Canada. Nor was Campbell’s an isolated case; Hugh MacLennan, W.O. Mitchell, Gwethalyn Graham, Bruce Hutchison, and others would achieve similar success in the 1940s.15

Such success can bring difficulties, however, especially when they occur within the context of a world war, and Campbell’s correspondence with Collins, along with other archival evidence of the period, provides a vivid picture of the serious difficulties which plauged author, publisher, and printer alike as all three struggled to meet an unprecedented public appetite for their product.

To begin with, books require paper, and paper during the Second World War became an increasingly scarce commodity as the wood-pulp industry lost many of its workers to service in the Armed Forces, or to higher-paying jobs in the defence industry. The shortage of paper became so acute that in 1943 Quill and Quire, in a flight of fancy, declared that the Canadian book trade was anxiously awaiting the return from overseas of its two vital raw materials: “the young writer and the young woodsman.”16

In 1944, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board implemented Order No. 332, respecting printed matter, an edict that required publishers to submit comprehensive statements of the books they intended to publish during the year, both by title and by weight. In the “Questions and Answers” leaflet that the Board distributed, it made a number of ardent recommendations for saving paper, including:

- Using the lightest practical weights and buying only in quantities urgently needed
- Narrowing the margins and changing the size and style of type to conserve space
- Dispensing with fly leaves, special paper linings, slip sheets, backing boards, and special covers17

17 Wartime Prices and Trade Board, Questions and answers, Franklin Appleton Papers, 1911-1947. Queen’s University.
The paper shortage in the United States had an even more dramatic effect. On 25 April 1945, Charles Duell of Duell, Sloan and Pearce, wrote to Campbell, apologizing for the quality of paper used for the American version of *The Higher Hill*: “I am sorry that our edition had to be considerably smaller than the Collins one.... We are limited legally here to a 45 lb. Basic weight on our paper stock.”

Even more important than the paper shortage, however, was the shortage of labour and the difficulty of maintaining machinery at a time when demand was escalating and every available resource was going towards the war effort. These problems appeared most vividly in the printing companies, including Hunter Rose, one of three major Toronto printing companies, which printed many titles for Collins, including *Thorn-Apple Tree* and *The Higher Hill*.

The balance sheets of the Hunter Rose Company for the war years show a steady escalation in annual sales, from $187,757.42 in 1939 to $245,754.57 in 1945 and $317,519.02 in 1947. These sales are matched by steady increases in the costs of labour and raw materials. Despite these rising costs, the Company took pride in its sustained profits. Labour costs never exceeded 45% of total sales after 1939, and the costs of raw materials remained under 30% of total sales. However, evidence from the Directors' Meetings suggests that this achievement exacted a heavy cost in labour and equipment. The General Manager, George G. Smithers, dominates the minutes with his increasingly urgent demands for new equipment. Existing equipment was wearing out quickly and needed to be replaced by equipment of much greater capacity. On 11 February 1941, he urged the Directors to purchase a new press to replace their aging Kelly press, which could only do 1800 impressions per hour, while new presses could do 5,000. In November of that year, he was calling for a new sewing machine for the overworked bindery. Early in 1943, the Board singled out the General Manager for special commendation “on account of the complicated situations with which he had to contend.” If the Board had meant to placate Smithers in hopes of hearing less from him, they were disappointed; on 18 May 1944, he declared: “The Press room is reaching the point where we are going

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to be in serious trouble ... Press No. 4 is of no use, and has not been running for months.” He urged that an order be placed immediately “for a new press to be delivered two years after the war.” And on 9 April 1945, he announced that there was more work than the plant could handle, and he “considered it advisable to farm out some of the work rather than have our customers take away any plates.”

The labour shortage was most keenly felt in the bindery; on 11 January 1945 “Mr. Smithers stated that our greatest problem now was to get a sufficient number of girls in our bindery department to keep up production.” According to the Report on the Canadian Book Trade, 1944, produced by the City of Toronto Board of Trade, this problem extended beyond Hunter Rose to characterize the entire book industry: “The binderies ... constitute the bottleneck of the industry at present, being handicapped by a serious shortage of experienced help.”

In 1944, this bottleneck was exacerbated by another problem that had a serious impact on trade publishers. Concerned at the shortage of Canadian school texts, the Printing and Publishing Administration of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board implemented an arrangement in which printing companies would give priority to textbooks at the expense of trade titles. While Quill and Quire for January 1945 announced that this was a “purely voluntary” arrangement, it evidently was strictly enforced at Hunter Rose; Smithers reports on 11 January 1945 that “the Wartime Prices and Trade Board has ordered us to increase our monthly output of textbooks to 75% allowing us 25% only for trade books.”

As a result of these problems, Canadian publishers found themselves ill-equipped to meet the explosive demand for new titles. The Board of Trade reported that the bindery problems were seriously

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22 Minutes of meeting of Board of Directors of the Hunter Rose Company, Limited, 11 January 1945: “Mr. Smithers stated that ... the Wartime Prices and Trade Board has ordered us to increase our monthly output of textbooks to 75% allowing us 25% only for trade books.” Book 5. Hunter Rose Papers. Smithers may have been overemphasizing the coercive stance of the Board. According to Quill & Quire (Jan. 1945), this was “a purely voluntary arrangement whereby the Canadian printing and publishing industry, recognizing the prime need to keep textbooks in print, are temporarily devoting the greater part of their time, labour and facilities to this end” (48).
inhibiting the capacity of publishing output: “in Toronto, which is the chief production centre, nine firms report a potential capacity of 60,750 books per day, and a current production of 18,700.... [I]t is probably safe to estimate that not more than one-third of possible production capacity is being realized at present.”23 Such limitations, coupled with the necessity under the new regulations of reporting publishing plans to the Wartime Board well in advance, meant that publishers had to allot their slender resources carefully, and had no flexibility to deal with the “surprise hit.” Grace Campbell’s correspondence of 1944 shows the effect of this constriction on the release of The Higher Hill.

Growth and Constriction: The Case of The Higher Hill

Expectations ran high for Campbell’s second novel The Higher Hill. Eager to repeat and expand on the success of Thorn-Apple Tree, Appleton arranged for an initial print run of 10,000 copies of The Higher Hill in the Fall of 1944, in time to catch the Christmas sales. The novel, however, got off to a rocky start. Early in the year, Campbell’s twin sons in the RCAF were lost within a month of each other, and the family tragedy delayed her completion of the manuscript. Appleton, himself plagued by recurring heart trouble and undoubtedly worried that the delay would cut into crucial Christmas sales, spent the summer of 1944 gently prompting his author for the chapters and the completed proofs.24 His care and tact were rewarded: Campbell completed the novel, and copies of The Higher Hill began to appear by the end of November, selling at an even faster rate than Thorn-Apple Tree had in 1942. But bindery problems struck the novel at this point: Appleton informed Campbell on 23 November 1944 that “no matter how many we could sell of THE HIGHER HILL we couldn’t possibly reprint or get more copies bound this year.” On 8 December, he was chafing at the cost in lost sales: “I am sure ... that had we been able to get bindings

24 Franklin Appleton, letter to Grace Campbell, 20 May 1944: “My feelings are a combination of sympathy and admiration for the fortitude that is given to mothers and fathers as you.” He goes on to say, “We’ll be glad to have the preliminary copy of the first nine chapters of THE HIGHER HILL to give Mr. Carmichael. Then we’ll be looking for the finished manuscript around the end of June.” File: Collins, 1944. Campbell Papers. The completed manuscript was submitted in early July.
through, THE HIGHER HILL would have a much larger sale than
THORN-APPLE TREE in the last rush before Christmas.” Delivery
problems persisted well on into the following year; on 14 May 1945,
Grace Miller of Collins apologized to Campbell for the delivery
problems on both of her novels: “New printings on both have been
on order since the beginning of the year. 7500 THORN-APPLE
TREE are now printed waiting to be bound. 10,000 THE HIGHER
HILL are just going to press. Our big problem is getting the books
bound.... So many binding plants have heavy arrears of school
books to do and these have priority over trade books.”

Vexed as she must have been by this delay and loss of sales,
Campbell could at least take consolation in the fact that she wasn’t
alone. Throughout the 1940s, Canadian publishers suffered from
successes which drained the bookselling industry’s resources. In the
same letter of 14 May 1945, Grace Miller recounted to Campbell the
tribulations surrounding Hugh MacLennan’s Two Solitudes: “We
had a great deal of difficulty getting this book out. By spreading the
work over three plants we finally got it out four months after the
American edition with which we had hoped to publish
simultaneously. A second edition is now being printed, but we still
have to face the problem of binding.” And according to Ronald
Cooke, in Canadian Business, Collins was caught again in 1946 by
W.H. Pugsley’s Saints, Devils and Ordinary Seamen, a book that had
great appeal to the Canadian Navy men now returning from overseas.
Hoping to bring out 10,000 copies, Collins was unable to get more
than 4,000, which sold out in four days. Nor was Collins alone
with this problem; in 1941, Quill and Quire reported that Nelson
Canada had been caught unprepared for the unexpected success of
Peter Fleming’s The Flying Visit, a novel about Hitler making a
mythical visit to the British Isles, which acquired a timeliness when
Rudolf Hess appeared in Scotland via parachute.

Such delays and shortfalls, while often unavoidable, had
unwelcome consequences, as Campbell was to discover after the
war. In particular, bookstores preferred to import cheap editions of
high-demand books from the United States, under terms which

25 Grace Miller, letter to Grace Campbell, 14 May 1945. File: Collins 1945,
Campbell Papers.
26 Ibid.
Figure 2 – Grace Campbell during the *Thorn-Apple Tree* promotional tour, Fall 1942.
severely curtailed the author’s royalties. In November 1947, when Campbell received a royalty cheque for the American sales of *Thorn-Apple Tree* and *The Higher Hill*, she was incensed to discover that 500 copies of a cheap American edition of *Thorn-Apple Tree* had been sold in Canada, for which she received royalties of only 4 cents per copy. In a courteous but angry letter to Jean Curtis at Collins, she complained that “all the copies I see in Montreal stores are American. I appreciate the fact that it is sometimes difficult to meet the demand and can understand the convenience of importing copies, but it does seem that it should be done without penalizing the author.”

Trade publishing in English Canada, then, was being shaped by the contingencies of a wartime economy, contingencies that acted severely on the physical product. Paper shortages demanded narrower margins and lighter paper, labour shortages and educational publishing demands forced printers to produce far below their potential output of trade books, making it difficult to keep popular titles in stock, and encouraging booksellers to fill the gap by importing from the United States.

**Book to Context: Book Production as a Political Act**

In the face of these severe constrictions, the behaviour of Frank Appleton at Collins at first seems strange. In particular, his enthusiasm for the book as a material object, his insistence on high standards of layout and typography, and his approval of wide margins, large type, attractive dust jackets, and high-quality illustrations could almost be seen as unpatriotic in a business environment that advocated the utmost stringencies as the best way to serve the war cause. Nonetheless, Appleton had plenty of reasons for his decisions, reasons which were grounded in the business, political, and cultural climate of Canada in the 1940s. And the *City of Toronto Board of Trade’s Report on the Canadian Book Trade 1944*, which Appleton chaired, provides valuable insight into these political and cultural dimensions.

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29 Grace Campbell, letter to Jean Curtis, 16 November 1947. File: Collins 1947, Campbell Papers. There is some doubt as to whether Campbell actually sent this letter. Most of her correspondence with her publishers was typed, and a carbon copy retained. This letter is handwritten, and while it shows signs of having spent at least some time in an envelope, there is no indication that she sent it. But there is no question that it vigorously expresses her opinion.
The *Report on the Canadian Book Trade* was prepared as an information source for British publishers seeking a market for their books in Canada. The committee also included such prominent names as publisher John McClelland, Edgar McInnis of the University of Toronto, and Charles R. Sanderson, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Libraries. As a message to Britain, the report contained several indictments of British publishing methods which illustrate how Canadian librarians, booksellers, and publishers envisioned the cultural and ideological role of the book in English Canada, and how that role was related to its physical means of production.

To begin with, book design was clearly a factor in Canadian resistance to the influence of American culture. Sanderson's chapter on public libraries complains that Britain's low standards of book production were inhibiting Canadian librarians from promoting British literature: “Even within the library walls, almost against the librarian's will, American books are given further advertisement, because the dust-jackets with their bright colour, good design, and story suggestion lend themselves so readily to displays.... [In addition,] the glue used in binding ... becomes brittle and cracks open; [and] the stitching loosens in sections of the book.”30 Sanderson's comments suggest that book production and design were necessarily a major factor in Canada's emerging nationalism, affecting the exploration of her various cultural roots and allegiances. With the United States occupying a dominant presence in Canadian letters, Canadian publishing, as well as British publishing in Canada, had to match American production standards with standards of equal attractiveness and sophistication.

In addition to being a national issue, book production was also a class issue. The report gently chides British publishers for reserving their best book designs for the privileged few: “British publishers seem to reserve their most attractive format, lavish colour, expert photography, good paper, and so on, for books which appeal to the specialist.... Could this technique, instead of being reserved for books for the very discriminating few, not be used on books for the many—for the casual middle-class readers.”31 This point suggests that in Canada during the war, high standards of book production reflected a commitment to a broader national self-awareness which to some

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extent cut across traditional class boundaries. “The present war,” the Board declared, “has given a tremendous impetus to Canada’s national consciousness. Her people have found pride in the tremendous physical achievements which have marked the war effort.”32 As Grace Campbell announced in her speeches promoting Thorn-Apple Tree, “we are members of a great company bound together by our awareness of each other. That is what we get out of the act of communion we call reading a book.”33 Appleton’s emphasis on attractive book production in the face of a wartime economy suggests that this act of communion involved the physical artefact as well as the intellectual content.

Collins and a Triumvirate of Patrons: Book Production in Action

Franklin Appleton was a committed nationalist. Rather than coming from the Collins Glasgow office, he began his bookselling career in Toronto as a shop assistant for his uncle, Albert Britnell, and served with the Musson Book Company and George J. McLeod before founding the Canadian branch of Collins in the 1930s. He was determined to prove that Canada could support a publishing industry of its own, and he initiated the White Circle line: cheap imprints of successful Canadian, American, and British titles. He also worked to create a stable of Canadian authors to be published specifically under the Collins Canadian imprint. In addition, Collins became the Canadian agent for the American firm Duell, Sloane and Pearce, thereby acquiring Hugh MacLennan, whose Barometer Rising had been published by Duell in 1941, and whose Two Solitudes appeared in 1945. Others authors included John D. Robins, William Pugsley, Isabelle Hughes, Hugh Garner, Roderick Haig-Brown, and Maida Parlow French. According to William Arthur Deacon, “Mr. Appleton not only built up one of the largest publishing businesses in Canada, but made it primarily a Canadian institution. By 1947 he was able to state that 73 per cent of all the books his firm sold were manufactured here.”34 This nationalism found its way into the physical books themselves; the dust jacket for Robins’s Incomplete Anglers boasts a circular emblem that proclaims it to be “A Canadian Book.” Not

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33 Grace Campbell, “Reading and Writing in Wartime.”
only was Appleton a nationalist, but like many who get their start in retail bookselling, he was enthusiastically committed to the book as a physical object with its own aesthetic integrity. As a result, according to Deacon, “remarkable taste was shown in the appearance of the books he published and even in his firm’s advertising.”

Lorne Pierce, at Ryerson Press, echoed this in his own tribute after Appleton’s death: “He was one of the first in Canada to endow good writing with beautiful format, thereby raising the whole tone of book publishing here. The books he published were symbols of his own aesthetic and moral integrity.”

This achievement was not Appleton’s alone; he was supported on the one hand by Deacon, who, as Literary Editor of the Globe and Mail, ardently championed both Appleton’s nationalism and his commitment to high-quality book formats. His second major ally was artist Franklin Carmichael, a member of the Group of Seven and Head of the Graphic and Commercial Art Department at the Ontario College of Art. Carmichael provided illustrations for Thorn-Apple Tree (for which he also supervised the design and layout), and for The Higher Hill, and John D. Robins’s The Incomplete Anglers. The illustrations for the two Grace Campbell novels were based on original wood engravings, “transferred photomechanically to more durable printing blocks.”

Carmichael’s influence on book design at Collins can be detected first in the comparatively extravagant use of paper. Even as the Wartime Prices and Trade Board was urging publishers to use narrow margins and economical typefaces, Carmichael was designing books with wide margins and large, elegant type. In Thorn-Apple Tree, the text covers only 44.4% of the page; in The Incomplete Anglers, the proportion is 47.2%, and The Higher Hill climbs only to 52.7%. These proportions are startlingly generous, compared to those of other wartime books. In The Forges of Freedom, published by Macmillan in 1943, the text covers 54.7% of the page; Collins’s own Two Solitudes (1945) stands at 69.8%, and Bruce Hutchison’s The Hollow Men (1944) from Longman’s at 70.6%. In The Higher Hill, Carmichael allots entire pages to comparatively small illustrations.

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35 Deacon, “Franklin.”
Figure 3 – Franklin Appleton, promoting the White Circle line. Photo courtesy of Queen’s University Archives, Franklin Appleton fonds.
And Carmichael, presumably with the evident cooperation of Collins and Hunter Rose, opposed the new wartime trend towards thin paper. In 1944, Quill and Quire attempted to make the best of a bad job by suggesting that paper shortages were actually creating a new fashion, and that Canadians were learning to value books which were “graceful in their very austerity, whose wafer-like pages make their pre-war prototypes seem to be printed on bits of blanket.” The paper for The Higher Hill, particularly, shows a pre-war bulkiness, of the sort which the Quill condemned as “not only impractical but definitely de trop.”

In the case of both Thorn-Apple Tree and The Higher Hill, the attractive book design became a major feature of the book’s popularity. Indeed, the fascination with the designs and illustrations threatened to eclipse the content. Quill and Quire, in January 1943, committed what was then an act of mild heresy, by suggesting that critical raptures over Thorn-Apple Tree were inspired less by the novel’s merits than by its physical format: “Hardly a reviewer, in dealing with Thorn-Apple Tree, has omitted to mention Franklin Carmichael’s fine woodcut chapter-headings which do so much to enhance the book’s appeal.... Let us call a spade a spade, and Thorn-Apple Tree for what it is—a pleasant story in an attractive gift presentation. Otherwise some readers ... may find on sampling that the fruit of the tree is a little soft at the core for their taste.”

This verdict does an injustice to Carmichael, as well as to Campbell; evidence from his unpublished writings suggests that his designs aspired to far more than “an attractive gift presentation.” His unpublished notebook, “The History of Signs,” reveals an extensive study of sign and symbol. In particular, he records a diamond-shaped dot, which he describes as “the origin from which all signs start, and [constitutes] their innermost essence”; he is also fascinated by the star, in which “a complicated and entirely symmetrical pattern is formed, with new and surprising sections and correlations.” The designs of Thorn-Apple Tree, The Incomplete Anglers, and The Higher Hill are filled with rich and complex explorations of these favourite symbols; in The Higher Hill, particularly, the image of the star merges repeatedly with images of blossoms, in which the symmetry of the star becomes the symmetry of petals and leaves.

38 “Among Bookmen,” Quill & Quire 10 (Jan. 1944): 22
40 Mary Carmichael Mastin 83.
THORN-APPLE TREE

GRACE CAMPBELL

70 Bond St. COLLINS Toronto

Figure 4 – The title page of Thorn-Apple Tree
Figure 5 – An illustration from *The Higher Hill*.

Figure 6 – An excerpt from Carmichael’s “The History of Signs.”
Photo courtesy of National Archives of Canada, Franklin Carmichael fonds.
For Carmichael, then, book design was an act of creative collaboration with the author, in which the material book made an aesthetic impression which strove to be harmonious with the aesthetic impression of the book’s content. And Appleton, by facilitating this collaboration, was doing far more than trying to turn a trifling book into an ideal Christmas present. By taking novels which were ardently Canadian in their themes and subjects, and mounting them as deliberate aesthetic objects, he and Carmichael were committing a deliberate political and cultural act, at a time when all actions—business, economic, social and artistic—had a perceived ideological relevance.

Conclusion

Trade publishing at William Collins and Sons during the Second World War emerges from archival records as a curious balancing act between economic contingencies and artistic extravagance, both entwined with an ideological awareness of the war and a sense of obligation to contribute to Canada’s war effort. On the one hand, the contingencies of publishing demanded severe compromises in order to preserve paper and to utilize slender labour resources in the most efficient possible way. At the same time, the contingencies of Canada’s growing nationalism demanded the production of books that were aesthetically-satisfying physical objects, with an artistic integrity all their own. The books produced by Collins during the Second World War enact this dual agenda in their very physical qualities. They are testaments to a mood in which a rising nationalism and national pride demanded some reflection in the production of well-designed, aesthetically-satisfying Canadian books, in a business environment that barely enabled books to be produced at all. They are the beautiful, fragile artefacts of an eventful stage in Canadian publishing history.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai examine les activités de la branche canadienne de William Collins Sons and Company pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Le témoignage des archives indique que l’industrie du livre au Canada anglais s’est développée considérablement pendant la Guerre, ce qui a mis à rude épreuve les ressources matérielles et la main-d’œuvre de cette même industrie. Même en temps de guerre, la conception du
livre chez Collins était d’une qualité remarquable, constituent un écho politique et idéologique du rôle du Canada dans le monde. Sous la direction de Franklin Appleton, Collins a résisté l’argument “patriotique” en faveur d’une certaine économie dans la production de livres. Appleton a fait publier des livres d’une beauté extravagante et sophistiquée, qui a reflété et encouragé l’intérêt du Canada anglais à sa propre culture littéraire.