Cependant, comme le fait remarquer l'auteur en conclusion, l'industrie du livre au Québec est passée en quarante ans du statut « d'une industrie fragile et désarticulée à une industrie solide, complexe et dynamique » (p. 225). Durant les prochaines années, il lui appartient de faire face aux problèmes décrits dans les chapitres précédents.

Fort bien fait, rempli de statistiques utiles et intéressantes, la plupart compilées par l'auteur, bien informé et bien écrit, le livre de Ménard dresse un portrait complet de la situation du marché du livre au Québec depuis 20 ans, comblant ainsi une lacune importante dans la recherche sur l'histoire récente du livre au Québec.

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Anyone familiar with the growing catalogue of publications about the history of books and printing has undoubtedly come across the names Rostenberg and Stern. Partners in a New York antiquarian book business for nearly sixty years, Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine Stern have collectively written or edited more than twenty-five books, and edited numerous others, making their special area of interest the anonymous and pseudonymous writings of Louisa May Alcott. Much of their literary output records their own experiences as self-described “literary sleuths” and book dealers. From Revolution to Revolution, the authors’ eighth collaboration, is a compilation of writings distilled from their earlier publications and essays on the exploits of the printer/publisher from the beginnings of the book trade to the present day.

This outing by Stern and Rostenberg is not intended as a comprehensive history of the book business; rather it is a chronicle of those individuals who helped to transform printing from a trade to a reputable profession. The emphasis here is on the publisher-bookseller from sixteenth-century Europe to present-day America and the actions taken by certain individuals to propitiate change
through publication. The authors explore the idea of publishing as a political act performed with the intent of challenging government or established religious institutions, diffusing scientific knowledge, contributing to educational enlightenment, improving foreign relations between countries or initiating technical innovation. For anyone concerned about the future of the book, the authors make their own efforts to reassure. “Of one thing we are sure” they write, the “second revolution,” a term applied by them to mark the rise of electronic publishing and the e-book, “may threaten but it will never replace the books that evolved from the first. Nor will it end that love of printed books that the past five centuries have kindled in all who read.”

In each chapter, Rostenberg and Stern provide the biographical background and ideological impetus behind the literary output of “revolutionary” printer/publishers involved with early printing in England, through to the inception of key players in the publishing industry in the United States. They begin with Aldus Manutius’s Aldine Press, which revived Greek scholarship and Latin classics by printing from manuscript Sophocles’s Tragedies and Dante’s Divine Comedy in the Italian vernacular in pocket formats suited for the student or teacher to carry easily. By the seventeenth century, William Brewster of the Pilgrim Press was using the printing press as a political instrument. Brewster separated from the Established Church in England and left the country for Leyden. There he printed books by English sectarians and shipped them back to England for sale and distribution, often packed into French wine vats to avoid detection.

This is a well-researched book, the narrative of each chapter filled with details that surprise and entertain. Yet, when Stern and Rostenberg have the opportunity to make immediate their personal and professional affinity with the output of some of the publishing houses under discussion, the writing loses its intended effect. Early in her career, Leona Rostenberg purchased a copy of The Perth Assembly written by David Calderwood in 1619 and printed from a manuscript smuggled to William Brewster at Leyden, the finished product smuggled back into Scotland from whence it originated. However, in describing this moment of discovery that should ideally make the reader experience vicariously the excitement of coming across a very rare book at a ridiculously low price, the writing fails to express the thrill. Stern and Rostenberg’s delivery is decidedly prim, so much so that it verges on the comic, and this doesn’t alter in their description of high points in their professional experience. The
events leading up to the acquisition of the rare Pilgrim’s Press title are written in the third person, a style that distances the reader from the subject and ensures that the immediacy that would lend real interest to the text is lost.

When Stern and Rostenberg turn their attention to the American wilderness and such printing pioneers as Elihu Phinney, William Williams, and Ebenezer Mack one senses that the writers are in familiar territory. Indeed, the two have previously published or edited a number of works devoted to printing in early America. We learn that Elihu Phinney traveled from Connecticut to Cooperstown, New York, with his printing press in 1795 to establish and print the Otsego Herald and his sons went on to publish the early writings of James Fennimore Cooper. It was such individuals as the Phinneys, the Williamses, and the Macks who published the early newspapers, the almanacs, and the texts and pamphlets “that guided the taste of the people at the same time that they recorded it, that bade the settlers pause and ponder the history that they were living.” Early printers are likened to the early woodsmen or planters, and often the revenues from book and newspaper sales helped to build schools, lay railway track and build canals while the printers themselves served as trustees on the public works committees behind these developments.

The themes of cultivation and innovation are further explored in a chapter on the publisher’s role in nineteenth-century America. The rise of the modern publisher, shaping the fate of authors and their books in the United States, prompts amusing anecdotes involving the birth of such classic books as The Scarlet Letter, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and Leaves of Grass. In the case of Hawthorne, the authors relate a meeting between the author and his publisher, James T. Fields (of Ticknor and Fields), in which the typically despondent Hawthorne, having no confidence in his work, had to be persuaded to retrieve his manuscript of The Scarlet Letter from its hiding place to give to his publisher saying, “take what I have written, and tell me ... if it is good for anything. It is either very good or very bad – I don’t know which.”

Having provided a rich history of the printed text and the intrepid souls who civilized our world by publishing them, when Stern and Rostenberg move into the present, and to their perfunctory debate on print versus electronic books, one can already guess where their allegiances lie. While nodding to some of the advantages of the e-book, as obviating the need to warehouse books, having the capacity to store a large number of heavy texts on one e-book reader (which,
to this reader, recalls the Aldine Press’s provision of texts in smaller formats for the convenience of the student), the instantaneous nature of electronic publishing and the ability of the publisher to edit and update existing texts rapidly, we know, despite the game attempt to see both sides, these two are still not sold. Nor, apparently, is the book buying public that has failed to make e-books a success story. The authors cite Anna Quindlen in How Reading Changed my Life: "people are attached, not only to what is inside books, but to the object itself, the old familiar form that first took shape ... centuries ago ... a computer is no substitute for a book." Finally, in this contribution to the "whither the book" debate, Stern and Rostenberg have established themselves as revolutionaries by subscribing to the view, seen by some as being counterproductive, or technophobic, that the notion that the printed book may be around for some time to come. And maybe being counter-revolutionary is just a little bit revolutionary after all.

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Josée Marcoux assigne à son ouvrage un double objectif : d’une part, mieux faire connaître cette maison d’édition qui, encore