
The juggernaut that is the History of the Book in Canada project continues at breakneck speed, producing its second volume of an anticipated three-volume series a mere year after releasing the first part. The first volume concentrated on Canadian print culture prior to 1840. This current volume ambitiously tackles the development of print and book history in Canada between the turbulent years of 1840 and 1918. A hefty tome of over 650 pages, weighing in at a wrist-breaking 1.725 kg, this volume, though engaging throughout, is not one you take to bed lightly, except at great risk of sustaining internal organ damage trying to balance it appropriately.

The volume weaves a subtle blend of statistically and empirically informed argument into its narrative. It is divided into seven parts: “Publishing a Country,” “Printing and Material Form,” “Authorship: The Emergence of a Profession,” “Distribution Networks,” “The Evolution of Libraries,” “Print in Daily Life,” and “Readers and Reading.” Each is further subdivided into substantial survey chapters, around which are clustered shorter case studies: some extremely original, others informative and functional. By far the longest section is that dedicated to “Authorship,” with almost 80 pages of textual material, much of it focused on the manner in which English and French-Canadian literary authors found their work and careers shaped by forces external to Canada, since in many cases, cultural capital was acquired through fostering a reputation and publishing abroad in London, New York, and Boston, among other places.

The contributors offer a great deal of fascinating material. Among highlights are Gwendolyn Davies’s sharply etched sketch of Canadian authors in pursuit of literary careers in Australia, the United States, and Britain; Fiona Black’s survey of marketing and selling books, which draws on trade summaries, trade literature, and other primary
and secondary sources to underpin an extensive analysis of book and print culture movement across Canada; and Yvan Lamonde and Andrea Rotundo's observations on marketing strategies adopted by booksellers and publishers throughout the century, ably supported by useful case studies by Teresa Nickels-Prilesnik and Greta Golick on subscription book agents and mail catalogues respectively. George L. Parker's finely detailed chapter outlining the tumultuous effect of Canadian copyright battles between 1840 and 1918 is worthy of note. His piece traces in miniature an epic narrative of nationalist motivated tariffs, laws, and pirating efforts enmeshed in running battles between American, British, and to a lesser extent French, commercial interests to control and exploit Canadian markets, and counter-struggles by Canadian publishers to support indigenous production and successfully compete in local and foreign markets. The chapter draws across several disciplines to shape material into a fascinating cultural micro-study of the impact of legal frameworks and economic activity on national industries, demonstrating one of the strengths of this collection: namely, its inter-disciplinarity. Other pieces draw attention to the practice of print in both the commonplace and the most unlikely of circumstances, such as Elaine Hoag's account of shipboard printing heroics aboard vessels stranded in the Arctic in the 1850s; Heather Murray's survey of the place of literary societies in Canadian reading and literary culture; Greta Golick's able analysis of the cultural role played by booksellers in local towns and communities; Eli Maclaren's study of print control and censorship and its role in supporting, legitimating, or discrediting factions involved in mutinies and rebellions in the Northwest in 1869-70 and 1885; and Stuart Clarkson and Daniel O'Leary's study of religious publishing, a key area of printing and periodical publishing activity in colonial Canada. There are even speculative pieces on books never published, as in the short flight of fancy by Marc André Bernier ("Lesbia in Montreal") documenting the curious case of the mysterious and erotic novels advertised but never printed in Montreal between 1893 and 1921. This case study never gets off the ground, though, for its author offers more questions than answers in the short space available to him.

Less satisfying also is the section dedicated to "Print and Material Form," which delves into the history and development in Canada of paper, image, type, press, binding trades, and technological developments implemented in support of printing and publishing during the period in question. The case studies on their own are
helpful but short, offering non-specialists bite-size introductions to various topics but leaving those with desire for completeness feeling a bit shortchanged as a result. More satisfying would have been an attempt to gather together disparate but linked case studies into a few well placed and larger survey pieces. Though no colour plates are used to illustrate the volume, there are a substantial number of black-and-white illustrations embedded in the text at appropriate points. This allows the reader the pleasure of encountering something out of the ordinary on a casual perusal, as for example, the 1888 photo of a printer's float in a parade in Quebec featuring a life-size statue of Johannes Gutenberg (85), or the 1876 illustrated advertisement of the interior six-floor setup of William Warwick's publishing, bookselling, and stationery firm in Toronto (105). What's also pleasing about this volume is the manner in which it draws in contributions from established scholars, while allowing space for new and emerging scholars to present the results of their research into Canadian print culture and book history.

At the heart of this volume, though, lies a conundrum that also affects other national history of the book projects. Ostensibly about Canadian print-culture developments, the volume spends a great deal of time charting print-culture traditions that are not necessarily indigenously Canadian. That is, Canadian book culture during this period is less about Canada and more about international publishing and print forces. As a nation in construction, Canada was torn between competing visions of its future political status, maintaining a balancing act between British and French-Canadian demands and interests, and facing economic domination by its American neighbour and its British colonial master. This was a period when Canadian identity was in flux, when the confederation of its British and French constituents was still being contested politically, and when regional identities and local traditions were shaped by immigrant and indigenous groups keen to retain their own cultural traditions.

Canadian book history and print culture during this period is thus not a monolithic construct, but a fractured one shaped to a great extent by external forces—politically, economically, and culturally. Print culture, as many of these chapters demonstrate, was used as a tool and a weapon to fight over differing notions of identity. At times, as Merrill Distad notes in an excellent piece on "Print and the Settlement of the West," the history and image of regions can be shaped just as much by polemic and print created by outsiders as by action within borders. The settling of the western regions of Canada
was accompanied and encouraged by an avalanche of material written about it by interested parties often unacquainted with its spaces. Titles about the West shaped its image for incomers from the 1850s onwards, an image aimed at encouraging and boosting immigration to western Canada, and controlled by outside political, economic, social, and individual interests. In contrast, titles published in the West or by writers from the region did not rise to significant levels until the twentieth century.

Even the material form of printing and publishing was determined by external sources. As the general editors point out in their lucid introduction, “the material form of Canadian print and binding is distinguished in this period by rapid adoption of materials and styles from the United States and Europe, rather than by local trends” (10). Likewise, Canadian authors were more likely to publish in the United States or Europe due to lack of an indigenous local market to sustain their literary careers. Even the matter of collecting and housing Canada's print culture heritage proved problematic, as Russ Gordon outlines in an engrossing study of the struggle over cultural heritage and political power that prevented Canada from developing a national library along the lines of the Library of Congress or the British Library until the mid-twentieth century.

W.A. Craik, Canadian editor of Bookseller and Stationer, asked in 1908, “What is a Canadian book?” Up until World War I, as this volume in essence demonstrates, the answer was unlikely to be straightforward. Canadian books and print culture were hybrid products, forged in international markets and by foreign interests, and for much of the period dependent on externally trained workers and foreign input to develop its potential within Canadian contexts. Its history is as much reflective of trans-national print culture trends and formations as it is of national characteristics. The History of the Book in Canada project should be commended for tackling such a difficult issue so straightforwardly in this in-depth and well-produced volume.

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