
Dean Irvine herewith makes a considerable contribution to feminist studies through a re-examination of a dominant narrative in Canadian literary historiography. In *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916–1956*, Irvine argues that literary historians generally focus exclusively on little magazines that embody the qualities set out by Louis Dudek in his seminal 1958 article, “The Role of the Little Magazines in Canada.” That is to say, they concentrate on “the aggressive, avant-garde, anti-commercial, and typically masculinist … to the exclusion of other magazines from the historical record” (5). Irvine counters that little magazines should be redefined as “non-commercial literary, arts, and cultural-interest magazines whose editors facilitated and participated in the construction of a magazine culture for their contributors and readers – but not, primarily, for profit” (16). If literary historians emphasize “the economy of the little magazine rather than its ideological approach,” they will be forced to address not only women editors but also non-commercial and traditionally feminized forms of labour, such as soliciting subscriptions, courting advertisers, typing stencils, and answering correspondence (16).

The book consists of five chapters with an introductory and concluding essay, as well as extensive notes, a list of works cited, and an index. Chapters 1 through 3 examine female poetry editors who were also poets themselves while chapters 4 and 5 provide brief overviews of magazines helmed by non-poets. Irvine focuses primarily on the first half of the twentieth century (towards the end there is a brief outline of Dorothy Livesay’s foray into the feminist magazines of the 1970s), contending that the release of the Massey Report of 1951 and subsequent founding of the Canada Council radically altered the business of publishing Canadian little magazines.

Organized chronologically, the first chapter examines Livesay’s incursion into leftist periodicals during the 1930s and sets the scene for chapter 2, which explores Livesay’s move to British Columbia and the founding of *Contemporary Verse* (1941–52). Chapter 3 describes P.K. Page’s experiences with Montreal’s *Preview*, Miriam Waddington’s work with Toronto’s *First Statement*, and the subsequent move of both poets to *Contemporary Verse*. Irvine not only recounts the involvement of these women in modernist periodicals but also provides a textual
analysis of their poetic contributions, making good use of primary documents such as writers’ notebooks to further his arguments regarding their poetic output at the time.

In chapters 4 and 5, the book shifts its focus away from detailed chapters devoted to a few well-known poets to shorter narratives of lesser-known figures in the cultural scene. Irvine inventories the editorial contributions and biographical details of Flora MacDonald Denison, Florence Custance, Mary Davidson, Hilda and Laura Ridley, and Eleanor Godfrey in chapter 4; and highlights the work of Catherine Harmon, Myra Lazeck-Haas, Yvonne Agazarian, Aileen Collins, and Margaret Fairley in chapter 5. He provides a detailed literature review and calls attention to gaps in the criticism. These two chapters may serve to form the basis of future feminist recovery projects.

The book’s most notable contribution to literary studies occurs when Irvine sets out his argument for reconsidering the traditional historiography of the little magazine in Canada. He illustrates how literary critics tend to follow the “Dudek-Gnarowski-Francis-Norris” tradition, with its concentration on the male poets of the Montreal scene in the 1940s (Scott, Smith, Dudek, Layton, Souster, etc.), while overlooking the contributions of women in both editing and typesetting roles. The compelling Dudek-centred narrative is not erroneous in itself, but it should be considered in concert with the “articulation of an emergent women’s modernism” (9). Even if they were few, there were worthy voices coming out of local poetry groups and the Canadian Author’s Association; outside of Montreal, Victoria and Vancouver were two of the many “alternative local and national communities of writers, editors, and readers” (6).

Editing Modernity combines the disciplines of literary studies and book history, and readers committed to either of these will find themselves challenged by lengthy passages devoted to the other. Irvine’s analysis of “fugitive” poems, for example, which he defines as uncollected poetry in periodicals or unpublished poems in archives, effectively illustrates the directions that these poets pursued in the early stages of their careers and will serve as a launching point for re-examinations of their bodies of work; the book historian might wish that the discussion had confined itself to the realities of publishing. But it is clear that Irvine is engaging several audiences here, and where he addresses the history of the book in Canada, he makes a noteworthy contribution.

My one quibble comes when he concludes that the transition to Canada Council support enabled several pre-Council magazines
to continue but that, “of these magazines, only Quarry was ever edited by a woman” (259). Irvine lists The Fiddlehead among these magazines, and although its editors may not have been female, managing editors include Sabine Campbell and Kathryn Taglia, while contributing editors include Janice Kulyk Keefer, Sue Sinclair, and Jan Zwicky, and a host of women have served as poetry and fiction editors for the magazine. Irvine also implies that the publishing climate became very inhospitable to women post-1957, but Fred Cogswell, former editor of The Fiddlehead, published the works of many female writers in much the same way as Irvine describes when he discusses Alan Crawley at Contemporary Verse, and Cogswell is well known for the mentoring role he played in his relationships with women writers.

Overall, Irvine provides a very effective argument for re-examining the canon and de-centering dominant critical narratives. This provocative book is highly recommended for historians, literary critics, and scholars interested in the history of Canadian publishing. Editing Modernity will stimulate discussion and generate new avenues of research into Canada’s overlooked journals and magazines.

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Les desseins de l’institution des lettres sont impénétrables. En effet, qui l’eût cru? La première exposition littéraire majeure patronnée par Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec n’a pas été consacrée à Anne Hébert ni à Jacques Ferron… mais bien à Yves Thériault qui, toute sa vie, a flétri les coteries littéraires; et, surtout, à celui qui avait fait le pari, presque insensé dans les années 1940, de vivre de son écriture. Il faut souligner aussi que l’ampleur de l’œuvre, de même que le 25e anniversaire de la mort de l’écrivain jumelé au 50e de la parution d’Agaguk, ont fait de l’année 2008 le moment désigné pour mettre en valeur cette œuvre protéiforme: roman, théâtre, conte et