Canadian Authors and Their Literary Agents, 1890–1977

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Although a number of studies have examined the role played by literary agents in the development of print culture in the United States and Britain, there are few such studies in Canada, and some of the scant commentary that does exist on the topic is incomplete or incorrect. Given the power of agents to affect literary production, it is startling to realize that we have no detailed history of their role in the development of English literature authored by Canadians. This essay aims to address this situation in three ways: (1) by providing an initial chronology of the relations between Canadian writers and their domestic and international literary agents, (2) by considering the role played by those agents in influencing literary production in Canada and abroad, and (3) by providing some specific examples

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1 Studies focused specifically on the role of literary agents in the formation of Canadian literature are few, the exceptions being Lorraine York’s examination of the relationship between Margaret Atwood and her agent, Phoebe Larmore (see note 23), JoAnn McCaig’s analysis of the correspondence between Alice Munro and Virginia Barber (Reading In: Alice Munro’s Archives [Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002]), and Linda M. Morra’s consideration of how literary agents and editors affected the career of Jane Rule (Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Women’s Authorship [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014]). In addition to these studies, which tend to focus on the relationship between specific authors and their agents, there is Clarence Karr’s frequently overlooked but excellent study entitled Authors and Audiences, which contains important information about Canadian authors and their agents from 1890 to 1920 (see note 39). Other important commentary on the influence of literary agents include Misao Dean’s “Researching Sara Jeannette Duncan in the Papers of A.P. Watt and Company” (see note 35), Carole Gerson’s “‘Dragged at Anne’s Chariot Wheels’: L.M. Montgomery and the Sequels to Anne of Green Gables” (see note 50), Faye Hammill’s Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada, 1760–2000 (see note 34), and Barbara Meadowcroft’s study of Arthur Stringer’s career (see note 38).
of how this influence impacted the careers of several Canadian writers.  

In their introduction to *Literature in the Marketplace* (1995), John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten observe that “any new paradigm of publishing history” must consider how “the direct connections between author and publisher, publisher and printing house, and press and audience were moderated by the interposition of other agencies” and must investigate “how those mediating agencies altered the nature, pace, and result of publishing.” In her ground-breaking study of early literary agents in Britain, Mary Ann Gillies says that her book “heeds Jordan and Patten’s call for publishing history to dispense with the ‘linear paradigms of production that commence with the writer’s idea and proceed straight-forwardly to publication and reception’ in favour of ‘conceptions of the activity of producing and consuming books that decenter the principal elements and make them interactive and interdependent.’” By so doing, Gillies’s work takes part in the wider project of contemporary print culture studies, that of knowing “more about how books were produced and consumed” and understanding “how that knowledge directs as well as contributed to our interpretations of culture and history.” Gillies’s study is “fuelled by the same belief that the examination of mediating agencies is crucial to a renewed understanding of print culture at the turn of the twentieth century.” By viewing texts in this way, we can begin to appreciate how, in Janet Wolff’s words, “art is a social product.” However, the story of how literary agencies affected the creation and dissemination of Canadian literature remains largely untold. Such a history would allow us to understand Carole Gerson’s observation that an author’s work is situated “within the larger cycles of authorship, production, dissemination, and reception of print.”

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2 I am indebted to Janet Friskney for providing detailed comments and feedback on an earlier draft of this paper. I also want to thank Matthew Rettino for his invaluable assistance in preparing this essay.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 10.


A common misconception is that literary agents and agencies were not active in Canada until the founding of Matie Molinaro’s Canadian Writers’ Service in the early 1950s. This misconception is partially the result of a prevailing definition of literary agencies that focuses on professional agencies established as formal business entities. However, as Gillies notes, the literary agent does not have to be a professional and does not need to own a business in order to operate on behalf of an author. Many prominent international authors have depended on friends or patrons or publishers’ associates in order to represent their interests. The case is no different for Canadian writers, who have relied on a web of formal and informal associations in order to further their interests. Those associations have profoundly altered the way in which authors are perceived by their publishers and their readers. They have affected the production and dissemination of literary works, and have influenced the kind of writing generated in different periods, in response to shifting market conditions. In a variety of ways, Canadian writers have worked both formally and informally with numerous literary agents in Canada, the United States, and Britain since the 1890s, and their connection with those agents has altered their own conception of themselves as producers of cultural capital. The widely held assumption that literary agencies only began operating in Canada during the 1950s is incorrect.

When did literary agents become a mediating force in print culture? Gillies observes that individuals in Holland performed many of the functions that we associate with literary agencies during the eighteenth century and that similar individuals were performing similar functions in Canada during the eighteenth century and that similar individuals were practising their profession as early as the 1820s. In his history of Canadian publishing, Roy MacSkimming maintains: “For years literary agents in Canada were even scarcer in Canada than wealthy writers. Until the late 1970s, a single Toronto agent, Matie Molinaro, represented many of the name authors” (The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada, 1946–2006 [Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003], 366).

9 In The Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada, George Fetherling argues that after Molinaro’s initial attempts at agenting in the 1950s, “only in the 1970s, with the entry of such agents as Beverly Slopen (1972) and Bella Pomer (1978), were authorship and indigenous Canadian publishing sufficiently complicated to require agents” (“Literary Agents,” Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada, ed. W.H. New [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002], 668). In History of the Book in Canada, Frank Davey notes that several Canadian authors found international representation in the 1920s and 1930s, but argues that it was Molinaro “who began working out of her Toronto home in 1950 and pioneered the concept of agents within Canadian publishing” (“Economics and the Writer,” History of the Book in Canada, eds. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, vol. 3, 1918–1980 [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007], 112). In his history of Canadian publishing, Roy MacSkimming maintains: “For years literary agents in Canada were even scarcer in Canada than wealthy writers. Until the late 1970s, a single Toronto agent, Matie Molinaro, represented many of the name authors” (The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada, 1946–2006 [Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003], 366).
trade in revolutionary France. In the first history of literary agencies in England and America, James Hepburn notes that friends, family members, literary critics, editors, and business people in Britain and the United States often acted as informal agents in the mid-nineteenth century. James L.W. West adds that “informal literary agents were operating in America as early as the 1820s.” However, the first literary agency to operate as a full-scale business was A.P. Watt’s influential London-based office, founded in 1881.

The increasing commercialization of authorship toward the end of the century created a desire for agents who could promote and protect writers’ business interests and their cultural capital. As West says, “the agent became a means by which commercial considerations and popular taste exerted influence on the author’s work, a way in which the tension between art and commerce was communicated to the author.” Originally, agents worked for both publishers and authors. They were middlemen who helped negotiate contracts, offered editorial assistance, promoted specific works, and even functioned as bankers who would loan authors money or hold securities on their behalf. As the agency model developed, agents aligned themselves increasingly with authors, and took upon themselves the task of protecting authors’ rights and of advising them about how best to package their work for the most effective presentation to publishers. Because the most successful agents were often hard-nosed negotiators, they often raised the hackles of publishers, who resisted the idea of dealing with a professional; as a professional, the agent often made demands that the author would never have made him or herself.

According to Linda Marie Fritschner, by the late nineteenth-century these middlemen “gained control of literary traffic.” Gillies notes that in this period, agents replaced the conventional relationship between authors and publishers with a new, triadic arrangement that altered the ways in which authors and publishers negotiated over the capital associated with literary production. The increasing

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10 Gillies, Professional Literary Agent, 3–4.
13 Ibid., 95.
empowerment of literary agents altered the contours of literature itself by subjecting it to the influence of a third party. As Gillies says, “once the agent had assumed his place in the literary world, it began to change in consequence of his presence.”\textsuperscript{15} The number of literary agencies increased significantly in the 1920s and 1930s. Agents in this period began to negotiate a wide range of rights on behalf of their author clients. David Finkelstein and Alistair Mc Cleery note that “by 1925, for example, there were common cases of agents negotiating over 26 different rights to a book, including rights to playing card and cigarette packet pictures.”\textsuperscript{16} By the 1950s agencies had become ubiquitous in the United States and Britain. As Fritschner observes, “in the 1950s the Saturday Evening Post took 80 percent of its material through agents.”\textsuperscript{17} Today there are more than a thousand literary agents in the United States who submit more than 80 percent of all material seen by publishers. Ironically, the number of agents and agencies is growing, while the number of publishers is diminishing.\textsuperscript{18} In Britain, by comparison, only 10–12 percent of British authors had an agent before the Second World War, but in the 1960s the number rose to 50 percent, and to 95 percent by the end of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{19} This steep increase in the level of representation reflected the growing perception that literature was becoming a commodity whose effective production and dissemination required business expertise. Today, many commercial publishing companies will not deal with an author who does not have an agent. As John B. Thompson notes, “in the 1970s and before, an agent was an optional extra for a writer; there were many authors who published with trade houses and worked directly with editors, without the mediation of an agent. By the late 1990s, however, an agent was a necessity: a writer who wanted to publish with a major trade house now needed an agent,”\textsuperscript{20} mainly because those houses had come to rely upon agents as gatekeepers.

\textsuperscript{15} Gillies, Professional Literary Agent, 26.
\textsuperscript{17} Fritschner, “Literary Agents,” 70.
\textsuperscript{20} Thompson, Merchants of Culture, 72–73.
who performed (without charge) an initial vetting to determine the commercial potential of any submission.

How do literary agents influence the form and content of an author’s work? Since publishers frequently prefer to deal directly with agents rather than authors, the agent has achieved more and more power over textual production. As Thompson says, “Agents provide the first filter in the system of selection through which new book projects get channeled into the publishing business. For the most part it is agents, not editors or publishers, who are expected to discover new talent, to find new writers whom they think are promising and to work with them to turn an idea or draft manuscript into something that an editor or publisher would recognize as an attractive project and potentially successful book.”

This means that the values held by agents profoundly influence the kind of literature that authors produce and their relationship with publishers. Often, the first glimpse a publisher has of a writer is the author profile and project description presented by an agent, whose job it is to package the author and his or her creative work in such a way as to make it appealing to the publisher. Proposals may go through multiple drafts as the author works with an agent to craft the presentation. In this sense, the agent is actively involved in configuring the author’s identity, of placing the author in a specific light. To this end, agents can influence everything from genre, form, character, plot, syntax, structure, typography, and the title of the work itself. Sometimes, agents even provide story ideas to their authors and edit their work. In short, agents are direct mediators in the creative process. Their activities affect not only the kind of literature that is produced but also the terms governing its production, including such variables as copyright, legal liability, royalty rates, and compensation related to a wide range of subsidiary rights, from translation, to e-books, to film, television, and dramatic rights. In an agency system, even the author’s royalties do not flow directly to the author; they go initially to the agent, who is responsible for paying the author his or her share.

The way we experience literature, then, is the product of a series of negotiations that take place at a distance ostensibly removed from the creative act; however, in reality, those negotiations are intimately tied to that act. As Fritschner says, agents changed the way in which publishers viewed authors, because “manuscripts were judged by

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21 Thompson, Merchants of Culture, 74.
the character and reputation of their representative.” All agented writing is mediated by economic concerns, while writing that is not agented increasingly finds itself outside what has become the conventional publishing infrastructure. For this reason, as Lorraine York notes, these “cultural intermediaries” play a “crucial role” in literary production.

If literary agencies are defined as registered business ventures designed to profit from the sale and management of authors’ rights, then it is clear that no such agencies existed in Canada until the 1930s, when advertisements seeking clients began to appear in the Canadian Bookman. However, literary agents can also be defined as informal mediators or interveners who operate without an official business mandate in order to support and promote specific authors or literary works. In this sense, there was a group of influential writers who fulfilled the function of agents toward the end of the nineteenth century. Most of them were expatriate Canadians living in New York.

As Nick Mount has shown, Bliss Carman was an influential agent in support of Canadian writers. He left Canada in 1886 to study at Harvard University. After graduating in 1888, Carman moved to New York, where he worked as an editor at several well-known journals including The Independent (1890–92) and The Chap-Book (1894–97). In her biography of Carman, Muriel Miller states that in addition to helping Canadian writers, Carman planned “to work up a literary agency with half-a-dozen avant-garde British writers of his acquaintance.” While Carman did not make a business of supporting Canadian writers, he used his editorial influence to place their work in American magazines, publishing the work of Charles G.D. Roberts, Archibald Lampman, William Wilfred Campbell, Duncan Campbell Scott, Gilbert Parker, and E. Pauline Johnson. Mount notes that Carman “pitched Lampman’s second book of poems to Stone and Kimball and a collection of [Peter Gilchrist] McArthur’s short stories to Small, Maynard.” Carman was particularly supportive of Gilbert Parker, whose stories he published in The Independent and

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22 Fritschner, “Literary Agents and Literary Traditions,” 64.
23 Lorraine York, Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2013), 17.
25 Muriel Miller, Bliss Carman: Quest and Revolt (St. John’s, NL: Jesperson, 1985), 75.
26 Mount, When Canadian Literature Moved to New York, 158.
then placed with Stone and Kimball. Eventually Parker found formal representation with London-based A.P. Watt and Company. Other informal agents supported Canadian writers, according to Mount:

Charles G. D. Roberts recommended a manuscript (a novel or perhaps stories) by Sophie Helsley to a Boston publisher, introduced Pauline Johnson to New York editors Richard Watson Gilder and Edmund Clarence Stedman, and found positions on New York magazines for his brothers William and Theodore and his son Lloyd. In Boston, Walter Blackburn Harte published Peter McArthur, Susan Frances Harrison, Agnes Maul Machar, and Ethelwyn Wetherald during his tenure as assistant editor of the *New England Magazine* in 1891–3, introduced his sister-in-law Edith Eaton to Americans in his own *Fly Leaf* in 1896, and, after returning to New York, printed work by Carman, Roberts, Wetherald, and Eaton in the *Lotus*, a little magazine published in Kansas City but edited by Harte from New York.\(^{27}\)

Another influential figure in the period was E.W. Thomson, who “witnessed and undoubtedly influenced the publication of close to two hundred articles, poems, stories, and serialized novels by Canadian authors during his ten years as a revising editor for the *Youth’s Companion*.\(^{28}\)

George Parker argues that even with this kind of intervention, it remained particularly difficult in the 1880s and 1890s for Canadian writers to succeed in a literary environment that was dismissive of colonial writing and that questioned the very existence of a Canadian literature.\(^{29}\) Furthermore, international copyright was still evolving, and Canadian publishing laboured under severe disadvantages. For example, the American decision not to join the 1885 Berne Convention and their adoption of a manufacturing clause in 1891 effectively prevented Canadian publishers from marketing their books in the United States, where they continued to be exposed to piracy. Eli MacLaren further explains that “The American Copyright Act of 1891 granted American copyright to non-American authors on condition that their books were manufactured in the United States. The effect was to strengthen the practice of publishing new books simultaneously there and in Britain. As before, publication in

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 159.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
Canada alone secured no American copyright. Like Haliburton’s *The Clockmaker*, Ralph Connor’s *Black Rock*, first published in Toronto and London in 1898, was widely reprinted in the United States, again teaching Canadian authors not to publish at home.”

Robert Barr, writing in the *Canadian Magazine* in 1899, argued that Canada “is a land that is willing to pay money for whiskey, but wants its literature free.” Existing copyright law made it impossible for Canadian authors to protect their work if it was first published in Canada, a factor accounting for the departure of so many Canadian writers to the United States, as Mount so convincingly demonstrates. Mount observes that “by the late 1880s the market in Canada for imaginative literature was based on cheap, pirated reprints or ‘colonial editions’ of standard English and American authors. In this active but highly competitive arena there couldn’t have been much room for original Canadian books.”

The only way Canadian writers could protect the copyright of their work outside Canada was to publish it first in England or (after 1891) in the United States. As a result, few authors wrote professionally. As Sara Jeannette Duncan explained in an 1887 article, “the market for Canadian literary wares of all sorts is evidently New York, where the intellectual life of the continent is rapidly centralizing.” Duncan was equally pessimistic five years later when she complained, “I have given up as hopeless any attempt to get my books on the market of my own country. They always seem to fall between the two stools of the London and New York publishers.” Accessing the American or British markets was difficult, however, especially for Canadian writers who remained largely unknown to readers outside the country. One way of increasing such access was through the representation provided by the professional literary agencies that had begun to emerge at the end of the century. Restrictive copyright

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laws compelled Canadian writers to seek American publication, and the best way of securing such publication was through a formal or informal agency relationship. In this sense, literary agents were crucial to the production and promotion of Canadian writing.

Gilbert Parker appears to be the first Canadian writer to have secured a literary agent. He was represented by the most prominent British agent at the time – A.P. Watt in London – as early as 1892. Sarah Jeannette Duncan also signed on with Watt and was represented by him between 1894 and 1903, when she terminated the relationship, only to return in 1905. As Misao Dean notes, Watt improved Duncan’s terms with several publishers, and transformed her profile in the public eye.35 While her early works had appeared in women’s journals like The Queen and Ladies’ Pictorial, Watt attempted to fulfill Duncan’s desire to see her work placed in “better class magazines such as Scribner’s, Harper’s, Century, etc.”36 To a large extent, he succeeded. In her study of Watt’s business methods, Gillies points to a number of strategies that he employed in order to promote his authors and their works. Although he initially conceived of his role as principally a seller of copyrights, he learned to retain them in order to exploit subsidiary rights: changing copyright laws often made it both possible and profitable to divide an intellectual property into a wide array of components and then sell, resell, or license them out to steady advantage. Watt understood, as well, that he could raise an author’s profile by “managing their public images,”37 building their name recognition so as to increase sales. As Watt’s importance grew, he began to influence the kind of literature that publishers desired, an initial indication of the extent to which agents transformed the literary marketplace and the writing produced to satisfy the market’s demands.

Watt’s American counterpart was Paul R. Reynolds, whose literary agency, founded in 1893, is considered to be the first in the United States. He handled the US rights for H.G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, Joseph Conrad, and George Meredith. He also had a number of prominent American writers on his roster, including Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Reynolds came to represent several Canadian writers, the first of whom was Arthur Stringer. After working as a journalist in Montreal from 1897–98, Stringer moved to New York to take up a

36 A.P. Watt to Sara Jeannette Duncan, 21 September 1900, MacMechan papers, folder 50.16, Dalhousie University Archives.
37 Gillies, Professional Literary Agent, 60.
position with the editorial staff of the American Press Association. By that time he had published two books of poetry in Canada. He signed on with Reynolds in 1902, bringing Reynolds fifteen of his stories in that year. Barbara Wales Meadowcroft notes that, “As Stringer’s literary agent, Reynolds negotiated with magazines, newspaper syndicates, and publishing houses, drawing up the contracts for Stringer’s work and collecting the royalties. Reynolds also handled subsidiary rights including film and radio rights, although by 1924, Stringer had another agent, Cora C. Wilkening, who dealt specifically with film rights.”

Reynolds’s impact soon became apparent. He began placing Stringer’s fiction almost immediately. The Silver Poppy, his first novel, appeared in 1903. With Reynolds’s assistance he started to release popular novels almost every year, until 1944. By the end of his career, Stringer had published thirty-eight novels and fifteen books of poetry. As Clarence Karr notes, Stringer “thrust himself into increasing prominence with self-financed volumes of poetry. With the services of agent Paul Reynolds, he then placed his first novels with major houses, including Appleton, Little Brown, and Houghton Mifflin, but these relationships never developed into long-term associations.”

Karr argues that “without the services of his agent, Arthur Stringer’s career might not have produced sufficient revenue for him to live on his literary earnings alone,” and that “it is unlikely that Reynolds worked harder to promote any other author,” even though he had many famous clients. According to Karr, it was Reynolds “who shepherded him through important refinements of style and genres.”

The man who might legitimately be called the first literary agent in Canada was Edward Caswell. Caswell was employed as the book publishing manager of the Methodist Book and Publishing House (MBPH) from 1892 to 1909. In this role he evaluated the work of many Canadian writers, saw their work through the press, and offered editorial commentary in order to improve the quality of a wide range of manuscripts. Caswell was a committed supporter of Canadian

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40 Ibid., 77–78.
41 Karr, Authors and Audiences, 45.
writing at a time when the public remained aloof from its national literature. As Michael A. Peterman and Janet B. Friskney have shown, “Caswell is arguably the first literary editor of major consequence in the history of Canadian book publishing.” In his support of Canadian writers through his connection with MBPH, Caswell was doing in Toronto what writers like Bliss Carman and G.D. Roberts had done in New York – involving themselves in editorial activities that actively promoted Canadian authors. Peterman and Friskney point out that *Bookseller and Stationer*, the Canadian trade journal of the day, said that Caswell’s extensive support qualified him as the “patron saint of many struggling Canadian authors” and that “in Caswell’s heyday his literary network included, among others, Catharine Parr Traill, William Wilfred Campbell, Charles Mair, Mary Agnes FitzGibbon, Ethelwyn Wetherald, John W. Garvin, Katherine Hale, Robert Service, J.D. Logan, Marshall Saunders, Nellie McClung and Agnes Laut.”

It was particularly through his relationship with McClung that Caswell established his credentials as an agent. In 1905, McClung submitted a short story to W.H. Withrow, who was the editor of the monthly denominational magazine and the Sunday school papers at the MBPH. The press responded by encouraging her to submit stories to various magazines in order to expand her reputation. When McClung asked whether the press would be interested in publishing a full-length work, she was told that it would be necessary to secure an American publisher in order to make publication financially viable. Caswell conceived a plan that might make this possible. As Peterman and Friskney note, he proposed that he would pay McClung $200 immediately if she would allow him to become “a partner in the story.” In return, he also proposed that the royalties would be shared equally if he was successful in placing the book with MBPH and an American publisher. Peterman and Friskney observe how “the offer does raise a question of professional ethics given his own

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43 “What Men and Firms in the Trade are Doing this Month,” *Bookseller and Stationer* (1908): 38, quoted in Peterman and Friskney, “‘Booming’ the Canuck Book,” 61.
44 Peterman and Friskney, “‘Booming’ the Canuck Book,” 61.
46 Ibid.
employment with MBPH,” but they also argue that “Caswell was taking a personal financial risk” on behalf of the author.47 McClung agreed to the deal, and Caswell approached the religious publisher, Chicago’s F.H. Revell Company. After Revell turned Caswell down, he went to A.C. McClurg & Company of Chicago, who also said no. He finally convinced Doubleday, Page & Company to take on the work. However, Caswell was unable to make good on his promise to give McClung $200, and he offered to release her from their deal, telling her that “if now you’d prefer to give me 10% of your royalties for securing you a publisher I’m willing, but if I had the $200 I’d prefer to ‘go halves.’”\textsuperscript{48} This probably represents the first Canadian instance of an agent proposing a conventional commission structure for his work. Moreover, the commission rate that Caswell suggested was the going rate for American and British agencies at the time, a fact indicating that Caswell was well aware of how agencies operated. As Peterman and Friskney conclude, Caswell was “pioneering the business of literary agency in Canada in his enthusiasm for McClung and her writing.”\textsuperscript{49} Given Caswell’s work on behalf of McClung, it is accurate to say that the first Canadian literary agent to work on a commission basis began his work in 1906.

American publication was necessary in order for Canadian authors to retain their copyright. In order to secure American publication, as well as access to the sales potential of the American market itself, Canadian authors usually had to rely on agents who understood the complexities of copyright law, subsidiary rights, and royalty arrangements. Authors who did not obtain the advice of agents or well-versed mentors risked losing a considerable amount of income and potentially even control over their own works. This is exactly what happened to Lucy Maud Montgomery in the early stages of her career. That career has to be seen in the context of just how important it was to secure American publication at the time. Carole Gerson writes that “from my research on the papers of a number of Canadian authors, I think it likely that during Montgomery’s lifetime (1874–1942) no Canadian-authored popular fiction series appeared that was not published in the United States.”\textsuperscript{50} She adds that “virtually

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 82.
no Canadian authors attempting to support themselves by writing could afford to publish only in Canada, with a population (and book market) one-tenth of that of the United States. Secondly, prevailing market and copyright conditions prevented Canadian publishers from easily accessing American markets."

Notwithstanding these hurdles, Montgomery approached the American publisher L.C. Page directly, partially because he had published Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts, and John Garvin, but also because he specialized in juvenile fiction, which was gaining a wide readership at the turn of the century. Montgomery signed with Page for the American edition of *Anne of Green Gables* in 1907. Karr points out that in the terms of his contract with Montgomery, “Page was taking advantage of a naïve, new author, but this attitude had nothing to do with gender. Since the founding of his firm in 1897, he had been systematically insisting on total control over his authors. He disliked literary agents and reprint houses, generally preferred to issue his own cheap editions, and considered ‘that a royalty of 10% was equitable on all popular best sellers,’ at a time when the industry standard was 15 to 20 per cent.” To make matters worse, the royalty rate that Page offered was 10 percent of the wholesale price, which effectively meant that her royalty rate was more like 5 percent of list price. Montgomery could not get out of this arrangement because her initial contract also called for the delivery of six more novels, all at the same royalty rate. In 1916, Montgomery turned to McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart in Canada as her new publishers and appointed them as her agents, but in retaliation Page withheld her royalty payments altogether, forcing Montgomery to sue him for breach of contract in 1918 and again in 1920. The outcome of these suits was not resolved until 1928. Although Montgomery won her cases, legal costs swallowed up most of the settlement. Meanwhile, Page sold the film rights to *Anne of Green Gables* to Hollywood in 1919, without Montgomery’s knowledge. She received no royalties on the sale, since she had not been advised to include terms for the sale of film rights in her original contract. Other writers who retained agents were able to avoid these contractual disputes. For example, British agent J.B. Pinker and New York agent Paul Reynolds assisted

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51 Ibid.

52 Karr, *Authors and Audiences*, 72.
Marjorie Pickthall, who, according to Carole Gerson, “knew the value of a good literary agent.”

Montgomery was the victim of a transitional period in publishing concerning the disposition of subsidiary rights, and particularly those related to film. As Karr observes, “until the 1920s, many publishers failed to incorporate movies as a specific subsidiary right in agreements with them.” There was no consensus about how those rights should be handled, and no general agreement about whether they should be granted at all. If granted, there were no clear precedents about the extent and form of remuneration for authors. Yet both publishers and authors understood that this new terrain offered the potential for substantially increased earnings, and everyone involved wanted a piece of the pie.

An author such as Robert Stead, who began publishing during World War I, “lacked any knowledge of movie contracts and could only fall back on his experience with books.” His British publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, also had no experience and could offer Stead little guidance. Yet Stead was attracted to the possibilities offered by the film industry. He tried unsuccessfully to sell film rights to his novels from The Bail Jumper (1914) on. Stead’s interest in film rights led to his involvement with Ottawa Film Productions, a company run by Ernest Shipman, a quick-talking businessman who had invested in a number of film ventures in the United States and overseas. By 1922 Shipman had created five separate Canadian film production companies. Oeter Morris notes that, through his Canadian companies, Shipman intended to focus on producing Canadian material for Canadian audiences. He was particularly drawn to Charles Gordon’s fiction. (Shipman’s first Ottawa production was The Man from Glengarry.) Shipman tried to convince well-known public figures to contribute to the financing of his projects and actively promoted their involvement with his films by placing them on his roster as company directors. Stead was named as a director in early 1922 and Shipman promised him an annual return of $10,000 if he invested in the company.

Although Stead had published five novels between 1914 and 1922, he was never able to secure a film sale, despite the efforts of his British
agent, A.P. Watt, with whom Stead signed in 1916. Watt represented Stead from 1916 to 1927. In 1923, Stead joined the American agency of Brandt and Brandt in New York, who represented him until 1935. For a four-year period, then, Stead had strong literary representation in Britain and the United States, but neither his American or British agents were able to sell film rights to his work. However, Watt was able to heighten Stead’s profile as a writer and to secure him new forms of revenue by insisting that he be issued separate contracts by his publishers in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

The perils of working against Watt’s advice were illustrated by the publication of Dennison Grant in 1920. Despite Watt’s objections, Stead insisted that the world rights be sold to Canadian-owned Musson, who had published the eminently successful The Cow Puncher in 1918. Stead’s nationalism, especially during the war years, prompted him to go with Musson, but Musson was unable to sell the international rights, a factor that precipitated Stead’s decreasing popularity. While Edward McCourt argues that “from 1920 on his popular reputation declined, almost certainly as a result of his choice of subject matter,” it might equally be argued that the decline was due to Stead’s decision to ignore the advice of his agent, which he did a second time by contracting with Musson (which was purchased by Hodder & Stoughton) for the publication of Neighbours in 1922. As Karr says, one of the reasons Stead turned to Brandt & Brandt was “to rescue him from publishers once more,” but a considerable amount of damage had been done through Musson’s mishandling of the rights to Dennison Grant and Neighbours, and although Brandt did manage to find separate publishers for The Smoking Flax in Canada and the United States, Stead’s reputation never recovered.

Although the Depression put a damper on publishing, it is clear that even in the midst of that economic downturn, and up to the end of World War II, literary agencies specializing in Canadian literature continued to seek authors. Unsurprisingly, given the structure of the industry, they were concentrated first and foremost in the United States. The first Canadian Writer’s Market Survey, published by The Writers Club of Toronto in 1931, was introduced as “the fruits of an effort to provide the Canadian writer with a reliable guide to markets for written materials of all types in Canada, Great Britain,

59 Karr, Authors and Audiences, 71.
the United States and other English-language countries." In its section on literary agencies, the survey concluded, “For the Canadian writer who desires to sell only in the Canadian market, the agent has little or nothing to offer. New York or London agents, for instance can rarely secure for the Canadian writer a contract with a Canadian editor which he cannot secure for himself, and there are no first rank agencies doing business exclusively in Canada.” The guide included listings by several American agents who expressed interest in representing Canadian writers. For example, Francis Arthur Jones noted, “I am interested in the marketing of the work of Canadian writers.” Kennaday and Livingston wrote, “We are interested in Canadian writers.” Harold Ober also stated his particular interest: “I am interested only in Canadian writers who have had some material published in the larger Canadian magazines or in American and English magazines.” The Paget Literary Agency also invited Canadian writers to submit their work, as did one Miss Holly, who stated that “Miss Holly is interested in handling work of Canadian authors provided the American rights are also included,” no doubt because the US market made it financially worthwhile for the agent in a way the Canadian market did not. “Miss Holly” was Flora May Holly, the first female agent in North America. Few Canadian agencies existed at the time because they faced stiff competition from a number of established New York agencies.

However, this competition did not entirely dissuade Canadians from entering the agency business. While most of the agents advertising in the Canadian Bookman in the 1930s and 1940s were American or British, there were also advertisements for agency services located in Hamilton, Kitchener, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. While some of these agencies were not “first rank,” since they were new and often informal businesses or services run by a single person, others were more professional organizations managed by two or more principals who had a background in publishing. Most of those who advertised themselves as agents remain elusive; more detailed inquiry into their circumstances needs to be undertaken in order to

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60 The Writers Club of Toronto, Canadian Writer’s Market Survey (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1931), 9.
61 Ibid., 275.
62 Ibid., 278.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 280.
determine the extent of their involvement in Canadian literature of the 1930s and 1940s.

For example, Robert J. Baylis advertised for “articles on Canadian subjects for foreign publication” in the *Canadian Bookman*.66 He listed his business address as 208 Federal Building, Hamilton, Ontario. This would have been the Federal Building at 72 James St. North, which housed the offices of Sun Life Assurance until 1920. Did Baylis operate a business exclusively devoted to selling foreign rights, or was he involved in another enterprise, selling rights on the side? And if so, to whom?

Baylis was advertising in the same year as Donald G. French, who used the *Canadian Bookman’s* classifieds to offer “advice and assistance in marketing and publishing your material” through his company, the Writers’ Service.67 French listed two addresses – one in Toronto, and a second in Elgin, Ontario. French is certainly a recognized figure in Canadian literature. He was an ardent Canadian literary nationalist who had founded the Canadian Literature Club of Toronto in 1915. In 1924, with J.D. Logan, he published *Highways of Canadian Literature: A Synoptic Introduction to the Literary History of Canada*. In an extensive article on French’s involvement with the Canadian Literature Club, and the ups and downs of his career, Heather Murray notes that he also worked as a reader for McClelland & Stewart, but that when his influence waned after the 1920s, French turned to other sources of income:

Whether from interest or from economic necessity, French maintained multiple other forms of employment in the 1920s and 1930s, continuing as a freelance writer and taking on freelance editorial work. In the mid-1920s, and again from 1929 to 1931, French had contributed a column titled “Writer’s Corner” to *The Canadian Bookman* (along with a baker’s dozen of other articles on literary topics): the 31 columns provide detailed technical advice to writers of short stories and poetry, as well as more general guidance on copyright and publishing. Drawing on the reputation he had gained through these columns – and continuing a strand of work extending back to the correspondence school of the 1910s and his “amateur poets” competitions for the Sunday World – French set up in business

as “The Writers’ Studio,” which functioned as an editorial bureau (although not as a literary agency) and as a publishing house.  

French also published a journal called The Writers’ Studio from 1933 to 1944. It billed itself as “a monthly aid for all who write: amateurs, professionals or beginners.” Was French’s The Writers’ Service, as advertised in the Canadian Bookman, the same as The Writers’ Studio, or did it represent an attempt to distinguish between two distinct services? Although Murray argues that The Writers’ Studio was an editorial service rather than an agency, it seems clear that French intended to profit from his reputation as a regular contributor to the Canadian Bookman. By using his extensive network to promote certain authors, by advertising advice on marketing and publishing, and by providing “guidance on copyright and publishing,” French certainly performed the function of a literary agent, even though he may not have advertised himself as such. French’s involvement with McClelland & Stewart in the 1920s and 1930s would also have familiarized him with the role played by an agent in authors’ affairs. As we have seen, McClelland & Stewart were acting as agents for a number of writers, including L.M. Montgomery.

Another figure advertising in the Canadian Bookman, in 1934, was Sylvia Stevenson, a British author of three novels who provides an address in London, England. She offered editorial services and “expert advice regarding suitable publishers” for a fee, and worked with a Mrs. Stevenson (her daughter?) who is listed as a “Canadian agent,” operating from 72 Heath Street in Toronto.

The agency path vanishes during the war years but reappears in 1946 with an advertisement by Hedges, Southam & de Merian in Montreal, who describe themselves as “Authors’ Representatives” working “in association with” D.C. Benson and Campbell Thompson Ltd. in London and W.A. Bradley in Paris (both major international agencies). Their advertisement reads, “All types of manuscripts wanted, both French and English, for sale in North America and abroad.” They specify that they charge “no reading fees” and that

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69 Donald G. French, The Writers’ Studio (Toronto: [The Writers’ Studio], 193–).
71 Advertisement, Canadian Bookman, March 1934, 45.
72 Advertisement, Canadian Bookman, December 1946, 4.
73 Ibid.
they operate on the “usual agent’s terms,” which will be “sent on request.”\footnote{Ibid.} The same company advertised in the *Dalhousie Review* the following year, under the heading “Manuscripts Wanted.” The company specified that they were “authors’ agents with excellent international affiliations” and that they wished “to secure scripts of all types for placing at best possible prices with Canadian, American, and European book and magazine publishers.”\footnote{Advertisement, *Dalhousie Review* 27, 1947, 130.} Judging from their prestigious business address (Dominion Square Building, Montreal), this company must have been quite well capitalized. It was clearly a professional agency, with strong international connections.

One of the company’s principals was Doris Hedges, who was the author of two Ryerson chapbooks – *The Flower in the Dusk* (1946) and *Crisis* (1947) – and the novel *Dumb Spirit* (1952). Hedges was clearly devoted to promoting Canadian literature after the war. In her obituary, it is noted that “she started a literary agency in 1947 [sic] specializing in manuscripts of veterans of the Second World War.”\footnote{Obituary, *Montreal Gazette*, 17 July 1972, 37.} Hedges was well known in the Montreal literary community and often invited to give public talks. In December 1947, she accepted an invitation to address the McGill Writers’ Club, as recorded in the *McGill Daily*:

The McGill Writers’ Club announces that Doris Hedges, well-known writer, critic and poet, will be guest speaker tomorrow night at their meeting in the Union Board Room. The meeting begins at 8 P.M. and is open only to members and those wishing to join the club. Doris Hedges is an authority on writing, her stories having been published in such magazines as “Good Housekeeping,” “Cosmopolitan,” “This Week,” “Macleans,” “Montreal Standard,” “The Toronto Star Weekly,” etc., as well as in such famous English magazines as “The Strand Magazine,” “The London Graphic,” “The Woman’s World,” “The Royal Magazine,” etc.\footnote{“Writer’s Club Will Be Host to Mrs. Hedges,” *McGill Daily*, 15 December 1947.}

In its coverage of the event, the *Daily* reported that attendance had been low because of “pressure of mid-term examinations,” but this did not stop Hedges from speaking about her experiences as a literary agent.\footnote{“Doris Hedges Meets McGill Writer’s Club,” *McGill Daily*, 17 December 1947.} According to the *Daily*, she “stated that her offices often received requests from American editors for good Canadian background stories. While the majority of Canadian writers have
the freshness of viewpoint that makes for a real quality of writing ... the greatest fault in many of the stories which she receives is a lack of sound short story form.”

A month earlier, on 3 November, Hedges was described in the Montreal Gazette as a “local literary agent” who had given a radio address “under the auspices of the City Improvement League and the Municipal Service Bureau” to inaugurate the Second Post War National Book Week in Canada. She argued that, “I believe our authors’ lack of self-confidence and their sloppiness are the main reason the markets of the world are not teeming with Canadian works.”

Hedges went on to note that “editors in every market are asking for modern Canadian fiction, but a mass of fairy stories, of supernatural material, and of historical romance is being offered. Canadians are not writing about the present and the future scene but about the past.”

Hedges was promoting realistic fiction and, as a literary agent, was complaining about its absence in the submissions she received. Yet critics such as Colin Hill have traced the origins of realism in Canadian fiction to the 1920s. It was as if Hedges had missed two decades of profound changes in Canadian fiction. After all, in 1946 she was living in the same city as Hugh MacLennan, who had published Barometer Rising in 1941 and Two Solitudes in 1945. Those were hardly “fairy stories.” And, as Hill notes, “there are about three dozen ‘core’ modernist-realist novels” that appeared earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s.

What could explain Hedges’s sense that such works were rare? The contrast between the clearly identifiable inception of realism, as demonstrated by Hill, and Hedges’s complaints about its absence indicates that although realistic fiction clearly did exist in Canada since the 1920s, it had not yet made enough of an impression on writers to alter the opinions of a well-connected literary agent, even in the immediate post-war years. More than twenty years after its initial appearance in Canada, then, the commercial perception of the presence of realism suggested that it had not gained widespread recognition as a new and saleable literary form among aspiring writers.

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79 Ibid.
80 “Writers are Held Frustrated, Slack: Lack of Self Confidence Also Blamed for Difficulties,” Montreal Gazette, 3 November 1947, 3.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
What this demonstrates is that our perception of literary trends can be significantly altered when seen through the eyes of those who make their living by trying to sell those trends. Canadian writers themselves may well have understood that writing in Canada was undergoing a profound shift in the years between the wars, but they had failed to translate this understanding into the kind of material that would have allowed agents such as Hedges to recognize the presence of the shift. Because agents were increasingly responsible for identifying potential authors to American and British publishers who were demanding more modern forms of writing, it remained difficult for Canadian agents to promote Canadian material outside the country. It could be argued, then, that one of the problems affecting the development of Canadian literature was a lack of literary agents who could inform Canadian writers about new trends in publishing (as Hedges tried to do in her address of 1947). However, this lack of agents was symptomatic of a lacklustre publishing industry that had failed to encourage the creation of competitive Canadian agencies. Canadian authors needed Canadian agents in order to become more saleable in foreign markets, but Canadian agents were few; Canadian agents needed Canadian authors in order to support their business model, but such authors were few, mainly because most authors still did not understand the benefits of literary representation, while those who did often sought it outside Canada. This situation persisted well into the 1970s. In the absence of Canadian agents, authors were forced to turn to independent business managers who acted as agents (Gabrielle Roy retained Jean-Marie Nadeau in this capacity in 1945) or to American agents (Hugh MacLennan signed with American agent Blanche Gregory while Morley Callaghan worked with Ann Watkins and Harold Matson in New York).

By the early 1950s literary agencies still had not established a strong foothold in Canada. Hedges, Southam & de Merian did not remain a presence in the decade after its founding in 1946. As a business occupying prime office space in downtown Montreal, it would have had to generate a fair bit of revenue, if only to pay the rent, unless it was supported by someone with deep pockets. Hedges seemed to be suggesting in her address that the quantity of material necessary to generate that revenue simply was not there. Perhaps this is why Canadian agents continued to work independently, and often to combine their services as agents with other forms of author assistance, including editing, proofreading, and typing.
One such lone agent was Carl Eayrs, who advertised in the spring 1950 issue of the *Canadian Bookman*. Eayrs was well connected. He was the brother of Hugh Eayrs, president of the Macmillan Company of Canada. Carl had spent fifteen years as an editor at the Toronto *Evening Telegram*. He advertised a “complete service for writers” that provided “more than a reading,” and also called himself both “critic and agent,” a description which indicates that he was equally comfortable in editing authors’ work, or in representing that work to publishers. In the summer 1950 edition of the *Canadian Bookman*, a similar advertisement was placed by Dorothy Benner of Fort Erie, who advertised herself as an “experienced manuscript typist” who was also prepared to offer “market help.”

Matie Molinaro founded The Canadian Writers’ Service in Toronto in 1950. Frank Davey observes that “Although a few Canadians advertised editorial and agency services in the *Canadian Author and Bookman [sic]* in the 1930s, probably the first Anglophone Canadian literary agent of note was Matie Molinaro, who began working out of her Toronto home in 1950 and pioneered the concept of agents within Canadian publishing. Most of her business before 1970 focused on arranging lectures rather than placing manuscripts.” Molinaro was later joined by Sybil Hutchinson, who had worked as the editor-in-chief at McClelland & Stewart. As the agency side of their business expanded, the client base came to include Earle Birney, Harry Boyle, Marshall McLuhan, and Mavor Moore, along with a wide range of prominent Canadian journalists, performers, and speakers.

Molinaro and Hutchinson soon had competitors. In summer 1956, they advertised themselves in the *Canadian Bookman* as “a Canadian literary agency reaching local and international markets for Canadian writers in all media.” In the fall issue of the same year, the Cirencester Agency in Niagara Falls billed itself as a “Canadian agency for Canadian authors” and called upon them to “send in your original stories, prose and verse, plays, and also published material for reprint sale.” An article in the summer 1957 issue of the *Canadian Bookman* noted the founding of The Iris Miller Agency, a “new literary agency for Canadian authors” which was “especially

designed for out-of-town writers who can, Mrs Miller believes, save
time, money and frustration by having their marketing done by an
agency right on the spot in Toronto where it has ready access to most
of the Canadian publishing houses and Canadian agents of British
and American publishers.”

Molinaro’s chief competitor was undoubtedly Willis Kingsley
Wing, a New York agent who had begun his business in 1932. King
represented a number of prominent international authors such as
G.K. Chesterton, Allan Sillitoe, J.L. Borges, Robert Graves, and John
Le Carré. In the early 1950s he began to work with Canadian writers
and gradually expanded his list of Canadian authors to include Ralph
Allen, Pierre Berton, Robertson Davies, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret
Laurence, Sinclair Ross, Jane Rule, Adele Wiseman, and Scott Young.
Indeed, it could be said that, at least until the late 1970s, King was
easily the most prominent agent for many Canadian writers. His
role in the promotion of those authors, and the changes he wrought
affecting their careers, remains almost completely unexplored.

Although we can see that there were several attempts at forming
agencies in Canada in the 1930s, 1940s, and through the 1950s, the
condition of writing and publishing in Canada remained weak
in the post-war years. The atmosphere was not conducive to the
establishment of literary agencies because Canadian authors’ revenues
were pitifully low. In 1938, literary critic E.K. Brown argued that:
“Economically the situation of our literature is, and always has been,
unsound. No writer can live by the Canadian sale of his books. The
president of one of our most active publishing companies, the late
Hugh Eayrs, estimated that over a period of many years his profit on
the sale of Canadian books was one per cent; and I should be surprised
to learn that any other Canadian publisher could tell a much more
cheerful tale, unless, of course, the production of text-books was the
staple of his firm’s business.”

Eayrs’s successor at Macmillan was
John Gray, who offered a similarly gloomy outlook for Canadian
literature when he addressed the Canadian Writers’ Conference at
Kingston almost twenty years later, in 1955. Gray pointed out that
“ideally an author should find from his work a lively sense of response

89 Advertisement, Canadian Bookman, summer 1957, 6.
90 E.K. Brown, “The Contemporary Situation in Canadian Literature,” Canadian
Literature Today: A Series of Broadcasts Sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1938), reprinted in “The
Problem of a Canadian Literature,” On Canadian Poetry (Ottawa: Tecumseh,
1943), 6.
in his audience and the means to live at least in modest comfort on his earnings,” but the Canadian audience remained small, so that “the writing of serious books in Canada remains largely an act of faith.”

This helps to explain why literary agents were not mentioned in the context of the “literary assembly-line” theme behind the conference. In fact, one of the chief organizers of the Kingston conference – George Whalley – was approached by Willis Kingsley Wing in 1954, one year before the conference took place, but he declined to be represented by him. Canadian writers, with a very few exceptions, were simply not thinking about agents, due to the negative perception of the commercial possibilities attached to Canadian writing at the time. Most Canadian writers were worried, first, about how to secure an audience. The idea of actually earning a living from writing – an idea associated with literary agencies – seemed a faraway dream. This negativity was reinforced by the comments provided at the conference by Gray, who wondered whether “we face the disappearance of the book, as some would have us believe,” and who noted that “if the book is to disappear it will be either for a replacement of a technical kind, or because of a failure of learning such as even the present disturbing symptoms do not prepare us to expect.”

What Gray did not foresee was that the report of the Massey Commission and the creation of the Canada Council would lead to a mini-explosion in Canadian book publishing during the 1970s and 1980s. New publishing houses were established that were able to sign commercial titles in an unprecedented, increasingly competitive manner. This flourishing encouraged the founding of several new literary agencies. The rise of literary agencies in Canada had a great deal to do with the establishment of the Canada Council because the result of federal (and later provincial) funding was to dramatically increase the viability of publishing in Canada and to encourage the founding of many new publishing houses that could sign commercial

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92 George Whalley to Willis Kingsley Wing, 20 October 1954, loc# 1032c, box 2, file 27, The Legend of John Hornby Correspondence, George Whalley Fonds, Queen’s University Archives.
titles that previously would have been impossible to finance. The Canada Council massively affected the “literary assembly-line.” As Canadian publishers multiplied, new venues opened up to writers while the industry became more competitive and more commercial. At the same time, the expansion of bookstore chains in the 1960s and 1970s made books much more widely available to consumers. Publishing revenues increased, resulting in further commodification of reading material. In this highly commercialized environment, the literary agent played a key role in promoting and protecting writers’ interests.

This shifting landscape encouraged the founding of several Canadian literary agencies. Perhaps the best known of these agencies was Nancy Colbert & Associates, founded in 1977. Colbert “fought on her clients’ behalf for bigger advances, greater control over foreign and subsidiary rights and greater commitment on the part of publishers for adequate promotion and responsible payment of royalties. She maximized the revenues her clients could realize by selling advance excerpts to newspapers and magazines, television rights, separate paperback edition rights, and foreign rights.”

By supporting her Canadian clients in this way, Colbert initiated a huge shift in the way Canadian authors were perceived by their publishers. Her strategies on behalf of her clients also accentuated the role that agents play in determining the kind of literature that gets published.

The pool of Canadian literary agents remains quite small. While there are approximately a thousand literary agents in the United States, there are only thirty or so in Canada. This means that Canadian agencies have a significant impact on publishing in this country. In many instances, the kind of literature that gets presented to Canadian publishers is the direct result of decisions made by a small group of people, again and again.

It is a bit misleading to paint a picture of Canadian literary agents presenting the work of their clients to multiple publishers in the hope of obtaining several competing offers. In fact, the pool of available publishers has shrunk considerably over the last decade. Many small and mid-sized Canadian publishers have ceased operating. At the same time, the “literary assembly-line” that was foregrounded at the Kingston conference in 1955 has been radically transformed by the

appearance of monopoly-conglomerate publishing corporations that threaten the existence of the few indigenous publishers that remain. For example, the CEO of the recently formed Penguin Random House Canada said, “I’m not interested in a book that is going to generate less than $100,000 in revenue unless the editor or publisher has a compelling vision for the book and/or the author.” In this kind of environment, agents have an even more influential role to play, because now the stakes are higher and the possibilities for increased remuneration greater. As the publishing model shifts toward these dominant conglomerates, agents must necessarily modify their own strategies in order to adapt to the new landscape.

Despite the growth of literary agencies in Canada, their future remains as precarious as the authors and publishers they serve. In spring 2015, the Writers’ Union of Canada undertook a survey of writers’ incomes in Canada compared with the United States and Britain. The purpose of the survey was to compare the situation of Canadian writers in 2015 to their situation in 1998, when the last survey was conducted. The report found that, taking inflation into account, writers were making 27 percent less than they did in 1998. Eighty percent of writers were earning an annual income below the poverty line. Female writers earned 55 percent of what male authors earned. The Writers’ Union concluded that these results “represent a cultural emergency for Canadians.” In some ways, conditions affecting writers and publishers in Canada are reverting to levels that will no longer support agencies at all – and when agencies or agents are absent, the author’s own agency is compromised.

This paper aims to correct the common misconception that literary agents and agencies were not active in Canada until the founding of Molinaro’s Canadian Writers’ Service in the early 1950s. In fact, Canadian writers have relied on a web of formal and informal associations in order to further their interests ever since Gilbert Parker signed on with agent A.P. Watt in 1892. Those associations have profoundly altered the way in which Canadian authors are perceived.

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by their publishers and their readers. I have attempted to sketch out a basic chronology of the relation between Canadian authors and their agents between 1890 and the late 1970s. Future studies are needed in order to explore the details of author-agency relationships during these years.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, l’auteur analyse les relations d’auteurs canadiens, de 1890 à 1990, avec leurs agents littéraires. Le vingtième siècle a été témoin de changements énormes en ce qui concerne le statut et la définition de l’auteur canadien. Or, l’examen des relations entre les auteurs et les agents littéraires met en lumière de tels changements et permet de mieux comprendre comment la littérature canadienne a été produite et diffusée. L’auteur fait dialoguer la biographie, l’histoire, l’économie, le droit d’auteur, les politiques gouvernementales sur la culture et l’analyse littéraire afin d’illustrer le rôle que les agents littéraires ont occupé dans la formation des carrières d’auteurs canadiens. Ce faisant, il cherche à corriger l’affirmation répandue mais fausse que les agences littéraires n’étaient pas actives au Canada avant les années 1950. Par la présentation d’un panorama chronologique des partenariats entre des auteurs canadiens ainsi que des agents informels et professionnels du Canada, des États-Unis et de la Grande-Bretagne, il propose les prémisses d’une histoire plus détaillée sur la nature de ce type de collaboration littéraire, qui a perdu au cours de ce siècle agité.