

## William Edward Daniel Ross's Transformation into a Popular Fiction Novelist, 1962-1967

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**Abstract:** William Edward Daniel Ross transformed himself into a popular fiction novelist in mid-life; the years between 1962 and 1967 witnessing his authorial advance from apprentice to journeyman. During this period, he produced at least 85 original novels, which appeared in the United States or the United Kingdom in hardback, paperback, or digest format. By 1966, Ross's rapid production identified him as a "literary factory" within the trade. As a "professional writer," he responded to the market needs of publishers, which led him to produce novels in multiple genres, including mysteries, westerns, nurse romances, and gothics. The majority of his novels appeared under pseudonyms, most of them feminine; as Ross recognised, this circumstance obscured his claims to authorship, leading to his early designation as "Canada's best-known unknown author."

A substantial collection of Ross's professional papers held at Boston University represents an invaluable resource into this author's early years as a novelist, and into the trans-Atlantic popular fiction market for which he wrote. In combination with newspaper and magazine articles episodically published about him, this resource reveals an author who, between 1962 and 1967, established himself with publishers as a reliable creator of popular fiction. Ross brokered key business relationships with several hardback publishers producing popular fiction for the commercial lending libraries, as well as half a dozen paperback firms. Ross's remarkable level of production relied on key "support personnel": his wife Marilyn Ross facilitated his writing daily while New York-based literary agents Robert Mills and Donald MacCampbell offered strategic guidance.

**Contributor biography:** A specialist in Canadian publishing history, Janet B. Friskney is the author of *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years, 1952-1978*. She also edited and introduced *Thirty Years of Storytelling: Selected Short Fiction* by Ethelwyn Wetherald. Other publication credits include articles on the Methodist Book and Publishing House of Toronto, nineteenth-century Bible and tract society activity in Canada, and the history of publishing for the blind in Canada. She served as associate editor to volume three of the *History of the Book in Canada*, and co-curated and contributed to *Imprinting Canada: The McGraw-Hill Ryerson Press Collection*, hosted on the website of Ryerson University Library.

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## Introduction

The death of William Edward Daniel Ross on 1 November 1995 marked the passing of one of the twentieth century's most prolific authors. During his 30-odd years as a popular fiction novelist, a role he took up in mid-life, New Brunswick-based Dan Ross—as his friends and colleagues knew him—produced over 350 books in a range of genres. These works appeared under variations of his real name (e.g. Dan Ross, W.E.D. Ross) as well as a myriad of pseudonyms, most of which were feminine. While Ross's acute productivity made him a topic of episodic interest to journalists from the 1960s to the 1990s, his focus on popular fiction largely excluded him from scholarship about Canadian creative writers active after the Second World War since those studies gave little consideration to those who wrote “narrative as a commodity” (Palmer 37). Indeed, described as early as 1964 as “Canada's best-known unknown author” (“Profile” 68), Ross is an absolute outlier when it comes to the well-established critical narrative around the expansion of Canadian literature post-1960.

For those engaged by the topic of Canadian authorship in its broadest sense, or the history of book publishing, Ross's career as a popular fiction novelist offers exciting territory to explore. Since he wrote numerous novels in several popular genres, with his work issued by multiple publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, his career offers insight into the trans-Atlantic popular fiction book market from the early 1960s to the mid-1990s. Exploration of his career is greatly facilitated by an extensive collection of his professional papers.<sup>1</sup>

This article places primary focus on the period between 1962 and 1967, years that encompass Ross's first publication of a novel in 1962 for the lending library market and his confirmation, by 1967, as a reliable author of original paperback fiction, a status that led Paperback Library to recruit him to author titles for the “Dark Shadows” series, a spin-off venture of a television show of the same name. During this period, he published at least 85 original novels in hardback, paperback, or digest format.<sup>2</sup> These years saw Ross advance as a popular fiction novelist from apprentice to journeyman, a progression that relied not only on his facility for rapid production, but also his determination to sell his work simultaneously in the United States and the United Kingdom, to engage with different popular genres, and to learn the hierarchy of the popular fiction market, a learning curve with which his agents assisted him.

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<sup>1</sup> Housed in the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, this collection contains professional correspondence received by Ross. I thank the Bibliographical Society of Canada, which provided me with a Tremaine Fellowship to support archival research in Boston, and the archivists who assisted me at the Center. Additional thanks to the reference librarians at the Saint John Free Public Library in New Brunswick, who facilitated access to its Ross circular files.

<sup>2</sup> In 2018, Brian Busby published an article highlighting *Lust Planet* (1962) by “Olin Ross,” a pseudonym that has been attributed to Dan Ross. In November 2016, while I was attending a conference in Saint John, New Brunswick, Marilyn Ross (widow of Dan Ross) told me that her late husband had not authored *Lust Planet*. Alden Nowlan's interview with Dan Ross indicates he “did write one sex book” (62), but no title is provided.

## Before the Novels

In mid-life, Dan Ross did not suddenly decide to produce novels without any prior writing experience. His creative impulse, and an inclination to pursue his livelihood in the cultural sector, were by then well established.

Born in Saint John, New Brunswick on 16 November 1912, Ross was the son of William Edward Ross and Laura Frances Brooks. After primary and secondary school in Saint John, he attended the Provincetown Theater School in New York for two years. Next came summer stock in New York while, during winter months, he led a theatrical group back home—the Players Guild of Saint John. During his early career, he also acted in theatres throughout New England. In 1931, a correspondence course taken through *Writer's Digest* provided an assessment of his writing skills. He was advised that, while certainly not a genius, he possessed an entertaining style that might prove appealing to magazines.<sup>3</sup>

Through the 1930s and into the 1940s, Ross persisted with the theatre. In Canada, he founded and operated the Maritime Theatre Players (MTP) from about 1937/38 to 1941/42. For MTP, he acted, wrote, directed, and produced plays. In the 1930s, Ross also began writing and acting in radio dramas, including work for CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio. After passing part of the Second World War with the Entertainments National Service Association, he took up film distribution, eventually co-founding Capital Sound Films with his first wife, actor Charlotte MacCormack (1922-1959), whom he had married in 1944. He pursued film distribution into the late 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

Television raised concerns about the future of film distribution, however, so in the 1950s Ross enrolled in a writing course at University of Oklahoma and began to co-author short stories with Charlotte.<sup>5</sup> As co-authors “Ross plotted, Charlotte wrote, and Ross polished.”<sup>6</sup> By the time Charlotte died in September 1959, the two had produced more than 100 short stories together.<sup>7</sup> The short stories he co-authored/authored before and after her death appeared in genre magazines (e.g. *Alfred Hitchcock Magazine*; *London Mystery Magazine*), religious journals (e.g. *Catholic Fireside*), and newspapers (e.g. *New York Daily News*).<sup>8</sup> Ross’s short fiction included two recurring sleuths: “Mei Wong” and “Sister Julia.”

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<sup>3</sup> Richard K. Abbott to Dan Ross, 3 February 1931, box 11, “Additional Outlines and Correspondence” file, W.E. Dan Ross Papers (hereafter WEDRP).

<sup>4</sup> Early career information from materials in W.E. Daniel Ross Circular Files (hereafter WEDRCF).

<sup>5</sup> After her death, “Charlotte MacCormack” also served as a pseudonym for Dan Ross.

<sup>6</sup> “W.E. Dan Ross” promotional piece, dated “Jan [19]67,” box 11, file “Miscellaneous Material,” WEDRP.

<sup>7</sup> “Ross Family,” WEDRCF.

<sup>8</sup> Articles and letters in WEDRCF.

### Early Novels and English-Language Publishers

When the magazine market for short fiction diminished in the late 1950s, Dan and Charlotte Ross contemplated writing novels (Perry 8). Prior to Charlotte's death, the two began a mystery set in New Brunswick; this work would eventually appear as *Murder at City Hall* (1965). Ross temporarily abandoned the project after her death, but in 1961 completed the manuscript of this novel and at least two others (Rogers 34). He also continued to produce short stories through the 1960s.

The experience gained from placing short stories with magazines and newspapers was likely invaluable as Ross pivoted toward publishing novels. In marketing his novels, from the outset he looked to the two largest English-language book markets: the US and UK. In general, he did not target Canadian publishers since his goal was to earn a living from his writing. As he explained in the mid-1960s: "Any novelist will tell you that Canada offers a minor market and scant rewards for fiction. Few novels are originally published in Canada[,] most of them being first published in the U.S. or Britain with a Canadian house taking over as a distributor (publisher) for this country" (Ross, "Yes" 10). During the 1960s, it remained commonplace for the Canadian market to be combined with either the US or UK market in publishers' contracts with authors.

In the early 1960s, Ross's options for selling his novels included publishers of hardbacks, mass-market paperbacks, digests, and periodicals which serialised novels. He pursued all of these markets, shopping around romances, nurse romances, mysteries, gothics, westerns, spy stories, and "modern novels." His earliest contact with a book publisher may have been in 1961, when he sent two manuscripts to Robert Hale Limited in London, England. Both were rejected by John Hale, current owner of the firm.<sup>9</sup> In the end, it was Avalon Books that issued Ross's first published novel. *Summer Season* appeared in fall 1962 under the pseudonym "Jane Rossiter." The book drew on Ross's first-hand knowledge of summer stock. Simultaneously published in Canada by Ryerson Press, the novel eventually sold between 3,000 and 4,000 copies (Perry 8).

In 1962-63, most of Ross's roughly half dozen published titles appeared as original Avalon hardbacks. These included the New Brunswick-based mystery *Out of the Night*, authored by "Dan Ross," and the first of many romances featuring nurses. For *Backstage Nurse* by "Jane Rossiter," Ross combined his theatrical experience and the medical knowledge of his second wife, Marilyn Ann Clark, an American nurse whom he had married in summer 1960. In interviews, Ross credited Marilyn with providing vital forms of support in the realisation of his novels. These supports included market and background research, editing and proofreading, and collaborating with him on plotting ("Dan" 7; Dearborn 54). He described the two of them as a team: "Maybe not a team in the usual understanding of a writing team, but it takes a lot of teamwork on our part to get those novels written and

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<sup>9</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 24 March 1961, 14 June 1961, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

marketed on a regular basis. With the type of writing I do, it's important to keep more and more novels coming" (Dearborn 54). Without Marilyn Ross's editorial support, he disclosed, he would not be able to produce in such volume. "I do the first draft," he explained. "She edits it and sends it back to me. I do the second draft and that's it" ("Saint").

Avalon remained a steady outlet for Ross's novels throughout 1962-67, issuing another five titles under "Jane Rossiter," four more under "Dan Ross," and publishing eight books each under "Ellen Randolph" and "Ann Gilmer." By 1964, Ross landed two more hardback houses, one American, one British. US-based Arcadia House issued two original Ross titles that year: *Five Nurses* by "Rose Williams," and his first western, *The Wells Fargo Brand*, by "Dan Roberts." Through 1967, Arcadia published many more, including a further three using "Rose Williams" and another eight under "Dan Roberts." In 1966 and 1967, Arcadia embraced several more pseudonyms. Three gothics appeared under "Clarissa Ross," plus three nurse books under "Ruth Dorset," and two others under "Rose Dana." Also in 1967, Arcadia issued two mysteries under "W.E.D. Ross." Finally, in 1966 and 1967, three titles authored by "Leslie Ames" appeared; these Ross co-authored with American author Orlando Rigoni, another writer of popular fiction in multiple genres (Skene-Melvin 5).

In the UK, after rejecting at least eight submissions, Robert Hale reprinted *Love Is Forever* in 1964 under "W.E.D. Ross." This book, published previously by Avalon under "Jane Rossiter," was the first of ten Ross reprints by Hale through 1967. Hale's first Ross hardback original, *Citadel of Love*, appeared in 1965, again under "W.E.D. Ross." By 1967, Hale issued several more of Ross's novels as original hardbacks, two more under the authorship of "W.E.D. Ross," and one each using the pseudonyms "Jan Daniels" and "Charlotte MacCormack." Hale also used an established pseudonym, "Rose Dana," for *Brooding Mist*.

Avalon Books, Arcadia House, and Robert Hale all produced hardback editions of popular fiction for the commercial lending libraries which had been active in the US and UK since the inter-war period, though by the early 1960s they were on the wane. Avalon, an imprint of Thomas Bouregy and Company, was known for publishing "'wholesome' books about career girls, romances, mysteries, westerns, and action fiction" (Crider 15). Arcadia was founded in 1934 to publish "good clean romances especially designed for the circulating library." Acquired in the late 1930s by Alex Hillman and Sam Curl, when the two parted in 1939, Curl retained Arcadia and focused its list on westerns and romances ("Arcadia"). When Curl went bankrupt in 1948, Arcadia was taken over by Nat Wartels of Crown Publishing. Wartels "absorbed it into his own lending library operation" and adopted the Arcadia House imprint (MacCampbell 33, 35). London-based Hale, established in 1936, came under John Hale's control in 1956. Particularly well known for producing genre fiction ("Robert"), the firm was a prominent supplier of lending libraries in the UK, a system dominated until the 1960s by the operations of W.H. Smith and Boots. While Smith ceased its library operations in 1961, Boots continued with its network into the mid-1960s, and smaller such ventures persevered in the UK into the 1970s (Nash, et al. 259).

While success with lending-library hardback publishers dominated Ross's initial years as a novelist, he also queried publishers producing novels in other formats. Indeed, as early as 1963 his *Kate Wilder, R.N.* appeared in the UK in the Hospital Romance Library (HRL), which offered full-length nurse romances in 64-page, two-column, paper-covered digests. Varied imprints on HRL volumes suggest it was a co-publishing venture between periodical publishers C. Arthur Pearson and George Newnes. Eighteen HRL titles issued between 1963 and 1968 are found in Ross's archives, with authorship credited to "Dan Ross" or "W.E.D. Ross."<sup>10</sup> Archival evidence suggests additional Ross titles appeared in HRL in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> In January 1965, Pearson asked Ross for copies of romances featuring nurses he had already published in the US.<sup>12</sup> Given this request, it is most likely that Ross titles in the HRL are a blend of originals and reprints. Since titles and authors on his novels were always subject to change when reprinted, one would need to examine the works' interiors to make a clear determination of how many of his HRL volumes were originals versus reprints. Through the mid-1960s certain of his HRL titles achieved Dutch translation in Holland and Belgium.<sup>13</sup> From 1966, Hale also agreed to requests from Pearson for reprint rights to Ross titles that were not nurse romances, but which were suitable for other Pearson initiatives—quite possibly other digest series. Eight such requests were documented by Hale in 1966 and 1967.<sup>14</sup>

Ross's correspondence between 1962 and 1967 suggests he experienced greater difficulty achieving serial publication of his novels. He received several rejections from the London weekly *Woman*, one from the *Woman's Mirror* (London), and two from Scottish periodical publisher DC Thomson. However, Thomson did make an offer on "A Mistress of Arundel" for *Secrets*. The *Sunday Companion* (London) turned down "Nurse of the North," but was willing to see a revision. In Canada, Ross received four rejections from the *Star Weekly*, but achieved some success down under: the Australian Consolidated Press accepted "Do You Remember" for its *Australian Women's Weekly*, a novel that had appeared previously in the *Daily News*.<sup>15</sup>

US paperback houses, by then issuing a blend of reprints and original titles, represented a significant area of growth for Ross from the mid-1960s. Two New York agents facilitated his expansion into paperbacks: Robert Mills, whom he retained by summer 1963,

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<sup>10</sup> Boxes 11 and 19, WEDRP.

<sup>11</sup> See correspondence to Dan Ross from C. Arthur Pearson and George Newnes, box 46, files 1-3, WEDRP.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Brandon to Dan Ross, 27 January 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Gans to Dan Ross, 28 November 1964, 31 August 1967, box 46, files 1 and 4, WEDRP.

<sup>14</sup> See John Hale correspondence with Dan Ross, box 46, files 3-4, WEDRP.

<sup>15</sup> Betty Stephenson to Dan Ross, 15 May 1964, 12 August 1964, 13 October 1964; Lesley Saxby to Dan Ross, 9 June 1964, all in box 46, file 1. Derek Birnage to Dan Ross, 15 February 1965; Sinclair Matheson to Dan Ross, 7 January 1965, 16 March 1965, 6 July 1965, all in box 46, file 2; Gwen Cowley to Dan Ross, 24 September 1964, 14 October 1964, 11 August 1965, 14 September 1965, box 46, files 1 and 2; Dorothy Bliss to Dan Ross, 27 December 1967, box 46, file 4, WEDRP.

and Donald MacCampbell, with whom he was working by 1964. In 1964, Ross's first original paperback title appeared on the US market: Pyramid Books issued *Surgeon's Nurse* by "Rose Dana," a pseudonym he used again in 1965 for his first three original paperbacks—all nurse romances—with MacFadden-Bartell (MB). In 1965, Ross also began a high-volume relationship with Paperback Library (PBL). PBL reprinted four previously published books, issuing all under "W.E.D. Ross," but also published four original titles under a new pseudonym, "Marilyn Ross." These comprised one nurse romance, and three gothics, including *Beware My Love* and the New Brunswick-set *Fog Island*. Pyramid similarly published an original gothic in 1965: *Durrell Towers*, under another new pseudonym, "Clarissa Ross" (which Arcadia House also used for Ross gothics from 1966). Pyramid also reprinted a nurse romance under "Rose Williams." The next year, 1966, witnessed one reprint from Pyramid, one reprint and one original from MB under "Rose Dana," while PBL issued another eight originals, all under "Marilyn Ross," a pseudonym to which the firm had now requested exclusive rights.<sup>16</sup> These eight titles comprised one nurse romance, six gothics, and the first "Dark Shadows" (DS) title—simply called *Dark Shadows*. In 1967, Ross added Belmont and Lancer to his paperback outlets while continuing to publish reprints or originals with PBL and MB. Belmont issued an original, *Nurse in Danger* by "Rose Dana," while Lancer undertook two reprints of nurse romances, both by "Rose Williams." MB focused on reprints in 1967, issuing four nurse romances under three established pseudonyms—"Ellen Randolph," "Ann Gilmer," and "Jane Rossiter"—as well as one gothic under "Dan Ross." PBL's reprints of 1967 included one nurse romance and two gothics, all under "Marilyn Ross," as well as four originals comprised of one spy novel (*Assignment Danger*), one gothic (*Cameron Castle*, set on Cape Breton Island), and two more DS volumes. These too appeared under "Marilyn Ross." By the end of 1967, Ross had published 23 original paperbacks and 17 reprints with half a dozen American paperback houses.

### Navigating Expectations

Ross's extraordinary productivity placed him in the category of "literary factory," to use a book-industry term from his day. In January 1966, the *New York Times Book Review* described Ross, by then writing his fiftieth novel, as someone who "must be one of the most formidable writing factories in this or any other hemisphere."<sup>17</sup> While his twentieth-century predecessor Peggy Gaddis averaged one novel per month, Ross could produce a 75,000-word work within two weeks (MacCampbell 37; Rogers 34). Ross recalled in 1971: "I discovered I could write extremely fast without losing any of the quality. I ... decided to use this attack. In order to live by writing ... you have to be very successful with one book or moderately successful with several" ("Province" 6). Ross self-identified as a "professional writer" able to

<sup>16</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 12 July 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>17</sup> Reprinted in "W.E. Dan Ross" promo brochure, box 11, file "Miscellaneous," WEDRP.

“write anything a publisher wants,” but resisted categorisation as a “hack.” He viewed himself as “an entertainer” who aimed at giving his “readers a good read”; nonetheless, some of his novels addressed “serious themes” and he designed crises that tested his characters’ mettle. “You don’t reach a popular audience unless you’re able to communicate with people,” he observed (Rogers 34; Dreskin 13).

As a high-volume writer of popular fiction in multiple genres, Ross’s experience of authorship differed from literary writers who concentrated on single novels drafted and revised over extended periods. Rather than creating semi-annual “lists,” the publishers he targeted focused on filling “lines,” often ones with specific monthly allocations. Writers able to produce solid work to deadline were valued by these publishers. They recognised reliable authors by offering multi-book contracts. By fall 1964, Ross had secured two six-books-a-year contracts, one for mysteries, and another for nurse romances (“Profile” 69). Then, in July 1965, PBL requested a “Marilyn Ross” title from him each month going forward.<sup>18</sup> PBL publisher Hy Steirman later reflected: “[Ross] has an old-fashioned respect for an editor’s skill, and always delivers on time. He’s an editor’s dream” (Dreskin 11). Publishers also expressed confidence in popular fiction authors by entering contracts based on outlines rather than complete manuscripts. In May 1965, PBL editor Sue Rosenberg recommended Ross submit outlines, believing it would save them both time.<sup>19</sup>

Publishers’ preferences drove Ross’s adoption of pseudonyms, which could be devised by the author, an agent, or the publisher. Two key concerns motivated their use. First, certain publishers felt that some genres authored by Ross recommended feminine pseudonyms. Second, publishers feared book borrowers/buyers would be put off if a single author’s name occurred too frequently on its books. In 1964, for example, John Hale noted that his firm’s sales people had expressed concern about romantic novels being associated with male authors—hence, *Love Is Forever* appeared under the ambiguous “W.E.D. Ross” rather than “Dan Ross.” Hale also advised Ross that his firm allowed only two books per year per pseudonym.<sup>20</sup> A Belgian publisher was similarly willing to publish up to one nurse romance per month in translation if Ross allowed pseudonyms.<sup>21</sup> If a publisher found that books issued under a pseudonym held particular market appeal, they might seek exclusive use of it, as PBL did in relation to “Marilyn Ross.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, pseudonyms significantly obscure the authorial claims of the creator, something Ross recognised. “I’m probably Canada’s most read unknown writer,” he once assessed. “But that’s because I use so many pen names” (Dreskin 10). Use of many pseudonyms also necessitates determining whether particular

<sup>18</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 12 July 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>19</sup> Sue Rosenberg’s recommendation conveyed in Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 4 May 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>20</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 26 February 1964, box 11, file “Additional Outlines and Correspondence”; John Hale to Dan Ross, 1 April 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Gans to Ross, 28 November 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 12 July 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.



ones should be restricted to specific publishers or genres (e.g. Ross embraced “Dan Roberts” for westerns), and keeping track of the titles on which they have been used. As Ross learned, the same novel issued under different pseudonyms and/or titles could spark concerns about plagiarism from readers (Dreskin 13).

Revisions sought by Ross’s publishers included changes of title, length, and textual content. Their concerns over textual content and quality generated feedback about structure, plot, characters, dialogue, suspense, and setting. For instance, an internal reader’s report in 1964 focused on characters in one manuscript: the stepmother was too extreme in her badness; one male character needed to be more attractive, the other more dedicated; and a change to American citizenship was recommended for the black-hearted doctor so that there was no suggestion of prejudice towards Europeans or Jews.<sup>23</sup> Canada’s *Star Weekly* turned down one novel, despite its Canadian setting, citing shortcomings of character, plot, and style.<sup>24</sup> Hale variously rejected Ross manuscripts due to confusing beginnings, too many scene changes, too- neat or inconclusive endings, shallow or incompetent characters, and insufficient suspense.<sup>25</sup> Rosenberg offered extended rationales for her rejections; when she did accept a manuscript, she provided direction about how to strengthen plots or characters.<sup>26</sup> For *A Gathering of Evil*, for example, she detailed how the climax should be revised for greater impact.<sup>27</sup> When PBL buyers complained Ross’s characters were too similar across novels, Rosenberg had Mills admonish Ross to make his characters more distinct.<sup>28</sup>

Setting offered particular challenges for Ross as he marketed titles on both sides of the Atlantic. Hale rejected several novels because he found them “too American” in dialogue, terminology, or topic, fearing British readers would struggle with them.<sup>29</sup> *Woman* similarly rejected one novel, deeming it impossible to anglicise.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, HRL simply encouraged Ross to send stories featuring English heroines if he was working on an original manuscript for the series, believing it would help UK readers.<sup>31</sup> *Castle on the Hill*, set in Canada, found acceptance with Avalon, but was rejected by the US magazine *Redbook*, in part for its setting.<sup>32</sup> Hale accepted *Citadel of Love*, a story set in Quebec, but the firm’s reader first

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<sup>23</sup> “MSC” Reader’s Report, 12 May 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>24</sup> Gwen Cowley to Dan Ross, 24 September 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>25</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 24 March 1961, 17 June 1963, 29 August 1963, 29 July 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>26</sup> See Sue Rosenberg (later Jacobson) letters to Robert Mills and Dan Ross in box 46, files 2-4, WEDRP.

<sup>27</sup> Sue Rosenberg to Dan Ross, 21 December 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 15 April 1965, box 46, file 3, WEDRP.

<sup>29</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 26 April 1962, 25 October 1963, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>30</sup> Betty Stephenson to Dan Ross, 13 October 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>31</sup> Dora Dixon to Dan Ross, 21 March 1967, box 46, file 4, WEDRP.

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Earl to Dan Ross, 18 May 1964, box 11, file “Additional Outlines and Correspondence,” WEDRP.

sought reassurance that the province did claim a carnival featuring a snowman, and a separatist movement.<sup>33</sup>

Publishers and agents also shared with Ross their perceptions of specific genres, thereby providing insights into the popular fiction market of the 1960s. Indeed, descriptions provided by these industry specialists offer a window into operational understandings of any prevailing “dominating procedure in common” (Palmer 126) associated with a particular genre. The author received notable advice regarding two genres: nurse romances and gothics. Ross wrote and published nurse books from his earliest years as a novelist, finding markets in the US, UK, and Europe. However, he occasionally transgressed genre norms. MacCampbell and PBL editor Marjorie Bair both described nurse romances as romantic adventures with predominantly hospital settings whose primary readers were teenage girls.<sup>34</sup> Given that readership, MacCampbell cautioned Ross in spring 1964 to pen idealistic and encouraging stories, avoiding anything ugly or sordid.<sup>35</sup> Later that year, the agent—who also acquired nurse books for MacFadden-Bartell—admonished Ross for submitting a manuscript that veered significantly from genre expectations: too much earthy realism, plus too much local colour, a doctor largely absent from the plot, and a heroine who contemplated four different men rather than the standard and acceptable two.<sup>36</sup> Published titles like *Backstage Nurse*, *Hotel Nurse*, and *Night Club Nurse* do suggest Ross occasionally innovated on setting, and got away with it!

From the mid-1960s, Ross shopped around gothic manuscripts on both sides of the Atlantic, finding greater receptivity in the US than the UK. He moved into the genre at the encouragement of Rosenberg at PBL.<sup>37</sup> While Carol Plaine at Pyramid considered atmosphere the most important element in a gothic, Rosenberg identified several key characteristics: a great, gloomy house harbouring a mystery; a spunky young woman whose life is threatened while resident there; a brooding master burdened in some way; and a love interest for the heroine, though not necessarily the master.<sup>38</sup> US-based firms PBL, Pyramid, Avalon, and Arcadia all purchased gothics by Ross. Some were historical, others contemporary. Though Hale did accept *Willow Lodge* for the UK, the firm turned down several other Ross gothics, believing English readers preferred straightforward romances or mysteries.<sup>39</sup> In 1966, Plaine stopped accepting outlines of Ross gothics for Pyramid, claiming

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<sup>33</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 31 January 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Bair to Robert Mills, June 26, 1963; Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 15 April 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP

<sup>35</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 15 April 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>36</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 16 October 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>37</sup> Ross would dedicate his 1965 gothic, *Fog Island*, “To Sue Rosenberg who has helped so much.”

<sup>38</sup> Carol Plaine to Robert Mills, 30 March 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP; Sue Rosenberg to Dan Ross, 23 November 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>39</sup> John Hale to Dan Ross, 2 November 1965, 2 March 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

his work did not conform to her expectations.<sup>40</sup> Yet, that same year, PBL affirmed its faith in Ross's capacity for gothics—and his timely production—by recruiting him to write the DS novels.<sup>41</sup> By mid-1969, with more than 2.5 million copies of DS novels sold, PBL's Steirman proclaimed Ross "the foremost writer today of Gothics" (Dreskin 11).

As he progressed from apprentice to journeyman novelist, Ross learned a hierarchy of remuneration existed among publishers of popular fiction. In general, it was more lucrative to contract for original paperbacks than hardbacks (Ross, "Pay" 1). The three hardback firms that facilitated Ross's entry into the market produced more attractive books, but their payments and print runs were modest relative to the US paperback houses where even smaller companies then did first printings of 80,000 copies, often followed by second printings of 25,000.<sup>42</sup> Arcadia's typical up-front payment for a western was \$150, though its editor was prepared to pay \$200 for Ross's first western, *The Wells Fargo Brand*, if not previously published.<sup>43</sup> Avalon offered authors about \$300 while Hale's standard advance to Ross was £50, likely on a print run of 2,500 copies.<sup>44</sup> Hardback publishers secured paperback rights in their original contracts because the norm then was for a 50-50 split between original publisher and author if paperback rights were subsequently licensed. For instance, each time Hale allowed Pearson reprint rights on its UK edition of a Ross title, the £42 transaction netted £21 each for Ross and Hale.<sup>45</sup> In time, Ross learned that Avalon achieved its profits, not by originating hardbacks, but by subsequent sale of paperback rights, for which it typically charged \$1,000.<sup>46</sup> So, the \$500 Avalon received from the reprint exceeded its original payment to the author for the hardback. Although Ross published with Avalon and Arcadia through 1967, by 1965 both Mills and MacCampbell counselled him to cut back on submissions to the hardback houses and focus his efforts on paperback originals.<sup>47</sup>

Greater demarcation in payment existed among the American paperback houses than was the case for the hardback firms. Original manuscripts typically commanded more money than a reprint of a work previously available in the US market. During the mid-1960s, PBL's base rates were about a \$750-800 advance for a reprint versus \$1,000 for an original. In 1965, Pyramid similarly paid \$1,000 for an original.<sup>48</sup> By 1967, Lancer offered \$1,000 to Arcadia for a reprint of one of Ross's nurse romances.<sup>49</sup> PBL's correspondence with Ross also

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<sup>40</sup> Carol Plaine's opinion appears in Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 2 February 1966, box 46, file 3, WEDRP.

<sup>41</sup> Jerry Gross to Dan Ross, 24 June 1966, box 11, file "Additional Outlines and Correspondence," WEDRP.

<sup>42</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 16 August 1967, box 46, file 4, WEDRP.

<sup>43</sup> Alice Sachs to Robert Mills, 14 September 1964, box 46, file 1, WEDRP.

<sup>44</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 25 November 1966, box 46, file 3; Beasley to Dan Ross, 22 February 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Hale Ltd. to Dan Ross, 13 December 1966, box 46, file 3, WEDRP.

<sup>46</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 25 November 1966, box 46, file 3, WEDRP.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 9 September 1965, 4 October 1965, box 46, file 2; Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 11 October 1966, 15 November 1966, box 46, file 3, WEDRP.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 14 June 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>49</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 3 February 1967, box 46, file 4, WEDRP.

clearly demonstrates how advances increased if an author “took.” It initially offered Ross \$1,000 advances on gothic originals, but within two years these increased to \$1,500 and then \$1,750.<sup>50</sup> From 1966, MacCampbell urged Ross to set his sights even higher and submit manuscripts to more prominent firms like Fawcett, NAL, and Signet, which paid advances of \$2,000 to \$2,500.<sup>51</sup> By 1971, Ross would achieve an annual six-figure income by producing, predominantly for the paperback market, about nineteen books per year (“Province” 6; Ross, “Pay” 1). By 1974, he indicated most of his paperback titles sold an average of 750,000 copies (Nowlan 60), making him, at the very least, an example of a “bestselling author, whose individual books may not sell exceptionally well, but whose cumulative sales are enormous” (Palmer 39).

### Conclusions

Tenacity and dogged hard work underpinned Dan Ross’s transformation into a popular fiction novelist between 1962 and 1967. Driven to make a living from his writing, by the mid-1960s he established himself as a “literary factory,” a status he maintained by working grueling 12-hour-plus days—about two hours each day devoted to professional correspondence, the remainder to writing (Nowlan 62). Though crafting mysteries brought him the most pleasure (“Saint”), as a “professional writer” he attentively followed market trends or met direct requests from publishers or agents which, during this period, encouraged him to produce novels ranging from westerns to nurse romances, and enticed him to engage with the gothic, the genre for which he is today most remembered. In the 1960s, his volume of production and choice of genres conspired to obscure his claims to authorship: by 1967, to meet the preferences of publishers, he had a dozen pseudonyms in play, though some of his work did appear under “Dan Ross” or “W.E.D. Ross.” Ross’s professional correspondence also highlights how his experience of authorship, in terms of his interactions with publishers, editors and agents, was marked by receipt of pragmatic criticism of his writing, mostly aimed at identifying elements of craft they felt in need of refinement, or transgressions of genre conventions. Innovation had to be subtle rather than bold if Ross wished to secure a contract within the popular fiction markets he targeted. Indeed, his experiences illustrate a phenomenon identified decades ago by scholar Paul DiMaggio: that in the production of objects of popular culture, tension can arise between the organisations from which they issue and the creators from whom the popular objects are sourced (442). In addition, Ross’s correspondence highlights how US and UK publishers differed in their perception of what readers would find appealing, and so, while he assuredly

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<sup>50</sup> Sue Rosenberg to Dan Ross, 23 November 1964, box 46, file 1; Robert Mills to Dan Ross, 12 July 1965, 22 October 1965, box 46, file 2, WEDRP.

<sup>51</sup> Donald MacCampbell to Dan Ross, 11 October 1966, 15 November 1966, box 46, file 3; 14 August 1967, 23 October 1967, box 46, file 4, WEDRP.

tried, he was not always successful in placing the same novel in both markets. Finally, Ross relied in significant ways on others to be successful, aptly demonstrating Fine's and Becker's assertions around the necessity of "support personnel" (Fine, 455 [Becker referenced by Fine]) in the realisation of cultural outputs. In aid of her husband's novels, Marilyn Ross engaged in daily labour, variously serving as co-plotter, first reader, editor, and proof reader. In turn, Ross's literary agents—Mills and MacCampbell in the US, but also those who aided him in the UK and European markets—shopped around his manuscripts and advised him on additional opportunities that had potential to expand his reach and marketability as a novelist of popular fiction.

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