

Introduction: The Cultural Performance of Authorship in Canada

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Contributor biography: Ruth Panofsky (FRSC) is Professor of English at Ryerson University in Toronto, where she teaches Canadian Literature and Culture. Her areas of expertise include the history of authorship and publishing in Canada, as well as textual scholarship. She is the author of *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman* (2006) and *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* (2012), and editor of the award-winning two-volume *Collected Poems of Miriam Waddington: A Critical Edition* (2014). Most recently, she published *Toronto Trailblazers: Women in Canadian Publishing* (2019). She has received fellowships from the Bibliographical Society of Canada and the Bibliographical Society of America. She is currently at work on a monograph about Key Porter Books (1982-2005) and its publisher Anna Porter, the first woman in Canada to establish an English-language publishing company devoted to non-fiction trade books.

The “professionalization of the writing life” came late to Canada (York 32). In the nineteenth century, Thomas Chandler Haliburton was the rare author who achieved international success with *The Clockmaker; or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*, first serialised in the *Novascotian* weekly newspaper from 23 September 1835 to 11 February 1836, then published as a volume in Nova Scotia in early 1837, and in Britain and the United States soon afterward. The series of sketches told by the wily Sam Slick, a Yankee clock pedlar, became British North America’s first best-selling work of fiction, although the largest financial benefit from *The Clockmaker* series (1837; 1838; 1840) went to its British and American publishers rather than its colonial author and publisher. By the latter part of the century, it still was impossible for domestic authors to earn a living through writing. As Nick Mount has shown in his study of the exodus, many chose to leave the country and settle in New York, where they established careers as professional writers.¹

In fact, the dominance of branch-plant firms and the agency system functioned to decelerate the pace of original Canadian publishing. The Toronto-based Oxford University Press Canada and Macmillan Company of Canada, for example, established in 1904 and 1905, respectively, became exclusive Canadian agents under contract to British and American publishers; they handled the distribution of foreign books and thereby protected foreign copyrights.² For a good part of the twentieth century, as Frank Davey describes, recognition

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¹ See Nick Mount, *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York*, Studies in Book and Print Culture (U of Toronto P, 2005).

² On the agency system, see Eli MacLaren, *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade, 1867-1918*, Studies in Book and Print Culture (U of Toronto P, 2011); and George L. Parker,

and royalty earnings were obtained by only a handful of Canadian writers—including L.M. Montgomery, Mazo de la Roche, Gabrielle Roy, and Yves Thériault—via foreign publication of their novels (103). Progress was exceedingly slow for most authors, who were hindered by inadequate copyright protection, the unavailability of subsidiary rights, and a comparatively small market in an otherwise vast country that was divided linguistically; for them, success was not attainable, neither within nor outside Canada’s borders.

Mid-century saw the formation of the Massey Commission, which reported on the state of Canadian culture in 1951, and the creation of the Canada Council for the Arts in 1957. During this period, writers continued to pursue literary careers outside of Canada. Prose writers Margaret Laurence, Norman Levine, and Mordecai Richler, for example, lived for many years in Britain, while Mavis Gallant and Anne Hébert relocated to Paris. Eventually, an infusion of federal funding led to the founding of several new publishing companies and gave rise to a “mini-explosion in Canadian book publishing during the 1970s and 1980s” (Lecker 117-18). This expansion of publishing venues, which also fostered a more competitive industry, was a great boon to authors.

It was not until the late 1970s, however, when literary agents increased in number and established themselves in Canada, that their efforts to secure improved publishing contracts for writers finally transformed publishing practice and the culture of authorship in the country. These agents sought “to internationalize Canadian writing, it being more lucrative for both writer and agent to place a manuscript first with an American publisher, and to split off the Canadian rights for separate sale and thus better domestic royalties” (Davey 112). The climate remained challenging for authors—few could sustain themselves by their writing alone—but the gains were significant in this vitalised and “highly commercialized environment,” in which agents now “played a key role in promoting and protecting writers’ interests” (Lecker 117-18).

Today, international publication and the presence of literary agents as intermediary figures in a profit-driven market remain important facets of authorial success. These and other particularities of Canadian authorship are addressed in articles that appear in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada/Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*. From its inception in 1962, the journal has been an outlet for scholarship on various aspects of Canadian authorship written by academics across a number of disciplines, such as literary studies, history, library and information studies, communications, and digital humanities. Current scholarship is also available in *Mémoires du livres/Studies in Book Culture*, the open-access journal established in 2009 and published by Université de Sherbrooke’s Groupe de recherches et d’études sur le livre au Québec. Overviews of the subject included in the foundational three-volume *History of the Book in Canada/Histoire du livre et de l’imprimé au Canada* (2004; 2005; 2007) and *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* (2016), which features a chapter on celebrity authorship, track the history of authorship and show it to be a continually expanding area of study.³

“Distributors, Agents, and Publishers: Creating a Separate Market for Books in Canada 1900-1920. Part I,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada/Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*, vol. 43, no. 2, Jan. 2005, doi:10.33137/pbsc.v43i2.18435.

³ See relevant chapters in Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde, editors, *History of the Book in Canada, Volume One, Beginnings to 1840* (U of Toronto P, 2004)/*Histoire du livre et de l’imprimé au Canada, Volume Un, Des débuts à 1840* (PUM, 2004); Fiona Black, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Yvan Lamonde, editors, *History of the Book in Canada, Volume Two, 1840-1918* (U of Toronto P, 2005)/*Histoire du livre et de*

This growth is evident in the number of monographs published in the past two decades that focus specifically on literary careers. Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, for instance, probe “the times and texts”—to cite their own subtitle—of writer and performer E. Pauline Johnson. Nick Mount and Clarence Karr examine the publishing careers of popular late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Canadian writers, respectively, including Nellie McClung, L.M. Montgomery, and Arthur Stringer, while Marie-Pier Luneau explores the career of writer and journalist Louvigny de Montigny. Faye Hammill and Linda M. Morra concentrate on English-language female authorship across three centuries, Hammill on the writers Frances Brooke, Susanna Moodie, Sara Jeannette Duncan, L.M. Montgomery, Carol Shields, and Margaret Atwood, and Morra on E. Pauline Johnson, Emily Carr, Sheila Watson, Jane Rule, and Marlene NourbeSe Philip. Chantal Théry, Chantal Savoie, and Adrien Rannaud attend to French-language female authorship of Nouvelle-France, the turn of the twentieth century, and the 1930s, respectively. I study the complexities of novelist Adele Wiseman’s publishing life; JoAnn McCaig reads the international success of short story writer Alice Munro in the context of her relationships with mentor Robert Weaver of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and literary agent Virginia Barber of New York; and Lorraine York surveys the career trajectories of celebrity authors Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Carol Shields, and others.⁴

The robust response to my call for submissions to this special topic issue of *Authorship* on the cultural performance of authorship in Canada confirms the vitality of the field. Taken together, the eight articles gathered here, written in English and French by scholars situated in Canada and the United States, trace the rise of Canadian authorship over the course of the twentieth century through to the present. They combine to investigate the difficulties and advances, the practice and culture, of literary and professional authorship. Thus, this issue represents an important contribution to Canadian authorship studies. It cannot offer comprehensive analysis, though it can galvanise further research in the area.

The issue opens with companion studies of Indigenous authorship. The first focuses on E. Pauline Johnson, who today is regarded as “Canada’s first prominent Indigenous author.” Carole Gerson and Alix Shield consider the interior illustrations that accompanied Johnson’s

l'imprimé au Canada, Volume Deux, De 1840 à 1918 (PUM, 2005); and Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, editors, *History of the Book in Canada, Volume Three, 1918-1980* (U of Toronto P, 2007)/*Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada, Volume Trois, De 1918 à 1980* (PUM, 2007); and Lorraine York, “Canadian Celebrity Authorship Moves On,” *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, edited by Cynthia Sugars (Oxford UP, 2015), pp. 80-91.

⁴ See Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)*, Studies in Gender and History (U of Toronto P, 2000); Mount; Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (McGill-Queen’s UP, 2000); Marie-Pier Luneau, *Louvigny de Montigny à la défense des auteurs* (Leméac, 2011); Faye Hammill, *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760-2000*, Cross/Cultures 63 (Rodopi, 2003); Linda M. Morra, *Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women’s Authorship* (U of Toronto P, 2014); Chantal Théry, *De plume et d’audace : femmes de la Nouvelle-France* (Triptyque, 2006); Chantal Savoie, *Les femmes de lettres canadiennes-françaises au tournant du XXe siècle* (Éditions Nota Bene, 2014); Adrien Rannaud, *De l’amour et de l’audace: femmes et roman au Québec dans les années 1930* (Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2018); Ruth Panofsky, *The Force of Vocation: The Literary Career of Adele Wiseman* (U of Manitoba P, 2006); JoAnn McCaig, *Reading in Alice Munro’s Archives* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002); and Lorraine York, *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (U of Toronto P, 2007) and *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity* (U of Toronto P, 2013).

published texts from the early twentieth century onward. They read the evolution of the drawings and photographs that appeared in most books by Johnson as having contributed to her construction “as an Indigenous author and to the interpretation of her stories and poems” by publishers, “given that her work was directed to a mainly non-Indigenous audience.”

In his article on Bernice Winslow Loft (Dawendine) and Ethel Brant Monture, Brendan F.R. Edwards argues against the prevailing notion of a “barren period” for Indigenous authorship that came after the end of Johnson’s literary career “and before the emergence of contemporary Indigenous writing in Canada, roughly between 1910 and 1960.” Edwards’s work of recovery demonstrates that political and social conditions had more of an impact on the careers of Loft and Monture than either “an ability (or inability) to write material of value.” Indeed, like Johnson before them, both were performers and writers who “left their marks on the stages and pages of settler Canadian libraries and bookshelves.”

The next two articles shift attention to the metropolis and its bearing on authorship. For Ceilidh Hart, the city—its streets, its politics, and its newspapers—has helped writers define “their authorial personae.” The city, she contends, has offered writers more than subject matter; it has had a significant role in the development of Canadian authorship, as well as the growth and “production of Canadian literature.” In tracing a “street-level” poetics that characterises the nineteenth-century poetry of Robert Kirkland Kernighan and persists in the contemporary verse of Bren Simmers, Hart shows how both authors locate “their writerly selves in the city”—Toronto and Vancouver, respectively—and thereby help to create “a public role for the poet in Canada.” Thus, the city, “rather than the nation,” becomes “a unique space for cultural production and a unique space in which to explore the role of the author in public life.”

Emphasis turns from poetry to prose in Brigitte Brown’s study of Sara Jeannette Duncan’s satirical novel *Cousin Cinderella: A Canadian Girl in London* (1908), which deploys “the trope of female authorship” through its “allegorized character Mary Trent.” Following serialisation in Britain, the novel appeared in British and American editions, with the latter entering the Canadian market. Brown examines the work’s publishing conditions and reception history, which align with “the circulation of people and printed material,” their readership and interpretation, that is foregrounded in the novel. With *Cousin Cinderella*, she asserts, Duncan succeeded in advancing “the novel genre in an English imperial literary market specifically because she had an astute knowledge of her reading audiences, as well as an awareness of the gendered expectations of a woman writing in the early twentieth century.”

Mid-century popular authorship is the subject of the next two articles. Karol’Ann Boivin and Marie-Pier Luneau survey a boom period in series publication in Québec. From the 1940s to the mid-1960s, popular novels set in the province and written by local authors under multiple pseudonyms circulated in instalments. Boivin and Luneau review one particular romance novel series, *Roman d’amour* issued by Éditions Police-Journal, to limn the interrelationship between genre, audience, and authorship, the latter shared between writers, illustrators, and publishers.

Janet B. Friskney’s article on New Brunswick-based Dan Ross, once described as “Canada’s best-known unknown author,” also attends to the strategic use of pseudonyms to advance a career. Friskney underscores the period between 1962 and 1967, when Ross “published at least 85 original novels in hardback, paperback, or digest format.” Over these

five years, Ross established himself as “a popular fiction novelist” by writing mysteries, westerns, nurse romances, and gothics, addressing market needs, and selling his work simultaneously in the United States and Britain. Although the use of feminine pseudonyms “obscured his claims to authorship,” Ross achieved commercial success with the aid of his wife and literary agents.

The closing articles consider aspects of contemporary authorship. Robert Thacker charts the literary connections between Canadian Alice Munro and American William Maxwell. Munro’s admiration for Maxwell ran deep. In 1988, she published an appreciation of his work, which was revised for a tribute volume to Maxwell issued in 2004. She also modelled *The View from Castle Rock* (2006) on Maxwell’s *Ancestors: A Family History* (1971). For Thacker, the tie between Munro and Maxwell moves “beyond the explicit evidence of one writer’s influence on another, and of one book’s presence as model for the making of another.” Examined through the lens of authorship, it serves “as an important example of two compatible writers” interested in “the play of the past in shaping” narrative.

Lorraine York analyses the career of author and activist Marlene NourbeSe Philip, who has received international recognition for her poetry and prose, but who regularly refers to herself as being “disappeared” as a writer in Canada and “whose contributions to cultural life have been systematically obstructed, partly because of her public activism on behalf of Black communities.” For York, Philip confronts “prevailing conceptions of authorship in Canada,” particularly celebrity authorship. In complicating the idea of celebrity in relation to a racialised author with a “bedeviling combination of disappearance and unchosen hypervisibility,” York reveals how Philip “offers a challenge to the regimes of visibility which tend to define literary celebrity.”

The fortuitous ability to pair the articles in this issue according to subject matter and chronology ought to assist readers of this journal. For those who are less familiar with Canadian writers and their varying degrees of success in reaching wide audiences, both local and international, this collection will serve an introductory function. For others with a knowledge of literary works originated in Canada, it will expand their understanding of how domestic writers came to establish themselves as “authors,” recognisable by their name, their work, or their capacity to earn income from their writing. For all readers, I hope this special issue will offer scholarly elucidation and arouse interest in the field of Canadian authorship.

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