

# PUBLISHING IN CANADA

## *Preface to a Symposium*

*George Woodcock*

A SYMPOSIUM on Canadian publishing, which most of this issue of *Canadian Literature* is, needs little in preface. Most of the main articles are by writers connected in some way, as publishers, booksellers or commentators, with the book trade in this country. It was to supplement these essays by a body of opinion from people outside the trade but vitally interested in it, that I also resorted to the old device of the questionnaire — “Opinions on Canadian Publishing” — which has allowed the condensed expression of views on many aspects of the subject. The contributors were chosen to represent various literary interests — and interests are by definition vested. Three are writers primarily — the novelists Hugh MacLennan and Roderick Haig-Brown, and the poet Earle Birney; Robert Fulford of the *Toronto Star* is the most knowledgeable literary journalist in the Canadian newspaper world; Arnold Edinborough is editor of *Saturday Night* and a critic; Robert Weaver is editor of *Tamarack Review* and originator of many important CBC literary programmes; Carl F. Klinck is General Editor of *The Literary History of Canada* and a leading academic critic; Kildare Dobbs is many-faceted — writer, former publisher’s editor and now magazine editor.

Deliberately, I asked plain questions. One contributor lamented their generalized tone, but, as all experienced interviewers know, the precise and detailed question can often box in the field of possible answers much too closely. I was concerned to provoke as many and as free opinions on Canadian publishing as possible. In my view, a good deal of detailed and useful comment has emerged

from this approach. Two questions raised generally unilluminating responses, and for the sake of space I have omitted them and their answers. Also, where answers were "Yes" or "No" or so brief as to allow summarization, I have done this in the prefatory notes to the questions. Where the answer, even though brief, was illuminating or individual enough to stand on its own. I have presented it in complete form.

One point insufficiently noted in the answers to the questionnaire is the astonishing expansion of the role of the private presses in the publication of verse. This is largely covered by Wynne Francis in her article on the Little Presses, but it is worth adding — to give some idea of the rapidity and importance of this change — that in 1959 (the first year for which *Canadian Literature* published an annual bibliography), 24 books of verse were published in Canada, of which 8 were from private presses, while only seven years later, in 1966, 67 volumes were published — almost three times as many — and 52 of them came from the small presses. Even then it is doubtful if all the mimeographed pamphlets published in various corners of the country were included.

A final general comment, on a subject also barely covered by the answers to the questionnaire, is perhaps to the point. Many books by Canadians are published abroad, in London, New York or Paris, and only become available here when they are distributed by Canadian publishers or jobbers on an agency basis. This is mainly because there is still an insufficiently large public in Canada for books which do not have a strong Canadian interest. I, for example, lived in Canada for seventeen years, and during that time published eight books in Britain (some of them in the United States as well as in French, Italian, Swedish and Japanese translations) before my first Canadian-published book appeared. Naturally, every writer is pleased to gain a wide international sale for his books, but for one very good reason it is unfortunate, for readers as well as for writers, that in such cases there is not also separate Canadian publication. Books by Canadian writers who publish abroad come back to their native land with a heavy mark-up because of agency sales, so that British and American readers buy them much less expensively than Canadian readers. The next necessary revolution in Canadian publishing is surely the production of separate Canadian editions of all books by writers working in this country, no matter what their subjects. When a Canadian publisher finds it commercially feasible to underwrite a separate edition of a book by a Canadian on Ancient Egypt or the Merovingian kings, one will feel that Canadian publishing and the Canadian reading public have at last come of age.