

PUBLISHING PRESENT

SIX YEARS ago (No. 33, Summer, 1967) we devoted the pages of *Canadian Literature* to a survey of publishing in Canada. There was not then much to choose from. Quebec publishing being considered apart in an article by Naim Kattan, there was in English Canada a landscape of big commercial presses and non-commercial little presses, and it was on this basis that the issue was arranged. Wynne Francis (who appears again in this symposium) wrote on the little presses. Presenting various views on the established houses, John Morgan Gray of Macmillan wrote as publisher, John Robert Colombo — with experience at the University of Toronto Press and McClelland & Stewart — wrote as editor, Bill Duthie — with experience as sales representative of two leading publishers — wrote as bookseller. Finally, a panel of writers, magazine editors and reviewers expressed their views on the current state of publishing; it was mainly a dim view, with most of its scanty light focussed on McClelland & Stewart, who then seemed to offer all that was hopeful in Canadian publishing.

The present collection differs from the past in more respects than it resembles it, and thus reflects the changes that have taken place over such a brief period in the Canadian publishing situation. The little presses are there again, joined in separate articles by the little magazines and the underground or alternative press, so that three times as much space is devoted to counter-cultural publication, which I think faithfully reflects the momentum of a change I already sensed when, in my editorial in 1967, I pointed out a sixfold increase in the production of poetry by little presses between 1959 and 1966. The little press, the little magazine and the alternative press have ceased to be a delicately ephemeral fringe of publishing in general; indeed, not only have such ventures vastly in-

creased in numbers, activity and audacity, but they have also grown in durability, and several of the presses which Wynne Francis mentioned in 1967 — notably Coach House, Weed/Flower, Quarry and Fiddlehead — are even more active today than they were then.

In addition, however, there has appeared a new category of small and on the whole intensely Canadianist publishers who have shifted the whole balance of publication in this country. Their emergence has largely counterbalanced one other crucial development during the past six years — the conversion of important native Canadian houses (Ryerson and Gage) into branch plants of American publishing corporations — and it has run parallel with an unprecedented governmental interest in publishing, exemplified by the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing and by the activities of the federal government in subsidizing Canadian publishers through the Canada Council and the Department of State.

In the present survey, devoted to publishing in 1973, it was obviously these radical changes that needed most attention, and this will explain what some readers may first regard as a certain imbalance in the contents. Once again, publishing in Quebec is discussed, this time by Max Dorsinville, but in a piece commenting mainly on the changes there in recent years that have paralleled those in anglophone Canada. University press publication, whose contribution to the number of Canadian books in print has rarely been fully acknowledged, is dealt with in a special article by Ian Montagnes. There is the group of three essays on counter-cultural publishing. There is also a group of items dealing with the new small presses which attempt to combine the commercial and the experimental; they include essays by two leading participants in this movement, while the questionnaire — unlike that in *CL* 33 — is based not on the views of critical outsiders, but on the motivations of committed participants in the current expansion of publishing. Finally, there is a critique by the journalist Morris Wolfe, a regular contributor to *Saturday Night*, of the Ontario Royal Commission's report on publishing.

This has left the established larger publishers virtually unexamined, except for my own essay on the reprint phenomenon, which necessarily stresses their contribution to this further phase in the recent expansion of Canadian publishing — in my view one of its most important phases. This is not from any intent to belittle their contribution in recent years. Quite apart from the university presses, McClelland & Stewart and Clarke Irwin among Canadian publishers, and the two leading subsidiaries of British firms (Macmillan over most of this period and

Oxford still), have published during these years many important volumes of Canadian poetry and fiction, history and biography, though it must be added that they have neglected Canadian drama and left the field open for the timely endeavours of New Press and Talonbooks among the small publishers and the University of Toronto Press among the academic houses.

Nevertheless, in planning this survey and referring back to its predecessor in 1967, I cannot help reflecting on the change in the comparative standing of McClelland & Stewart then and in 1973. In 1967 McClelland & Stewart concentrated the hopes of most people who were concerned for the future of writing in Canada; they were more enterprising than other large publishers, more willing to take a gamble, more perceptive — through their editors — of emergent talent, and one appreciated the immense effect Jack McClelland's energy had at that time in opening the horizons of Canadian publishing. Evidently, however, he did not open them far enough, for it was very shortly after the summer of 1967 that the existing little presses, who catered frankly to small minorities, were supplemented by the whole new galaxy of small presses which revealed not only authors and subjects with which the existing presses — even McClelland & Stewart — could not cope adequately, but also substantial readerships who seemed to have been waiting in unconscious eagerness for the books that New Press and Anansi and Jim Lorimer and Mel Hurtig and Talonbooks had to offer them. Obviously Canadian publishing needed an expansion outside either the existing big presses or the existing little presses.

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