

REVIEWS

The Kings of 70 Bond Street

Ruth Panofsky. *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture*. Studies in Book and Print Culture, ed. Leslie Howsam. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. xiv +346 pp.

People are the focus of this book. Personalities, relationships, family circumstances, predilections—these elements are at the centre of Ruth Panofsky's survey of the literary activity of the Macmillan Company of Canada from its founding in 1905 as a branch of Macmillan and Company of London to its demise through a series of corporate acquisitions toward the end of the twentieth century. By narrating the life stories of the presidents and the leading editors, which she organizes as a succession of kings, Panofsky portrays their convictions, their interactions, and their achievements, linking these character portraits into a grander identity, namely, the essential nobility of Macmillan's contribution to Canadian literature. As the first of many reiterations of the thesis puts it, "From 1905...to 1986...Macmillan was a crucial catalyst in the shaping of Canada's literary heritage, instrumental in fostering a literary aesthetic, a culture of authorship, and a modern literature for Canada" (7-8). In plainer terms, Panofsky argues that the men and women employed by the Macmillan Company of Canada at its stately premises at 70 Bond Street in Toronto dedicated themselves to publishing excellent books and in so doing transformed Canadian literature.

It is a thesis forged out of signal instances and then applied generally to the eighty-year period. The last and perhaps best editor at the Macmillan Company of Canada was Douglas Gibson, and Panofsky makes a compelling case for his having substantially intervened in the career of Alice Munro at a pivotal moment. In the mid-1970s, Gibson successfully attracted Munro to Macmillan by affirming both the artistic and market value of her preferred genre, the short story, against the pressure she otherwise felt to write a novel: a letter preserved in the Macmillan archives in Hamilton, Ontario, records Munro's attestation that "'He was absolutely the first person in Canadian publishing who made me feel that there was no need to apologize for being a short story writer, and that a book of short stories could be published and promoted as major fiction'" (253). After *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), Munro went on to publish ten more outstanding books of short stories with Gibson (who moved to McClelland

and Stewart in 1986), and in so far as they both please a wide audience and reward intense critical scrutiny, this editorial bond between Canadian author and editor is indeed, undeniably, of the first order of significance. Even in light of the prior importance of *The New Yorker* to the development of her career, it is fair to say that, latterly, Gibson published Munro, in the highest sense of the verb.

President Hugh Kane's publishing of Dennis Lee's *Alligator Pie* (1974), editor Kildare Dobbs's discovery of Adele Wiseman (1955), and director Ellen Elliott's acquisition of W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947) are equally convincing triumphs on the part of Macmillan individuals. Should the publication of Thaddeus A. Browne's jingoistic *Belgian Mother, and Ballads of Battle Time* (1917) be ranked with these? That Frank Wise, the first president of the Macmillan Company of Canada, arranged for the printing of one obscure book of poetry does not really amount to his "lay[ing] the ground for a Canadian literary aesthetic" or lend support to his "broad cultural achievement as publisher" (63). Likewise, president John Gray published Sinclair Ross's *The Well* (1958), but it should be noted that this was a botched job that left the author badly shaken and that Macmillan rejected Ross's next novel (Stouck xvi–xxi). Yet if Panofsky is reluctant to ascribe blunders to Macmillan, this reluctance stems from a biographical respect for her subjects, a method that nevertheless uncovers much useful material.

In fact, the amount of archival research that has gone into this book, at McMaster University, the New York Public Library, the British Library, and elsewhere, combined with its coverage of an entire century, furnishes so much information that other theses begin to take shape. One is the undervalued contribution of women as editors and publishers. Another is American hegemony, manifest in that the Macmillan Company of New York never truly conceded the separateness of the Canadian market: in 1940 George P. Brett, Jr., president of the American company, offered to buy the Macmillan Company of Canada, and in 1956 he cancelled their fifty-year-old agency agreement in order to distribute his books to the Canadian market more effectively (120, 161). A third potential thesis is that, under distinct conditions, Canadian literary publishing has evolved. Far from being parallel to publishing in other countries, much less a constant through time, the process of transforming a literary manuscript into a commercial, public object in Canada both displayed radiant variety and underwent general change over the course of the twentieth century. For example, the in-depth case study of Mazo de la Roche presents an author who was formed by the American market. In 1927, she won the \$10,000

Atlantic Monthly novel prize for *Jalna*, moving out of vulnerability and ill-paid neglect into the self-confidence of the professional writer. Because of the prize, and because of the manufacturing clause in U.S. copyright, a “tempestuous” (83) triangle then formed among de la Roche, her American publisher (Edward Weeks of Little, Brown, and Company of Boston), and Hugh Eayrs (the second president of the Macmillan Company of Canada), who distributed her books to the Canadian market. As she pumped out sequels, the complicated relation gave rise to friction and misunderstanding. The fact that Eayrs privately mocked her (88) is a sign of his lack of sovereignty: he had no choice but to keep the Canadian cash registers ringing for what were, essentially, American editions.

How his role as *publisher* contrasts to that of Hugh Kane in the case of John Diefenbaker’s memoirs fifty years later (1975–77). This time, the Macmillan Company of Canada was the only firm involved. It was now Canadian-owned, having been sold by its London principals in 1972–3 (a mixed blessing, given that the new owner, Maclean Hunter, was based in the magazine industry). Kane approached the author, rather than vice versa, and offered him an advance of \$100,000. The Canada Council for the Arts, which had been created in 1957, contributed \$49,100 to the project, and there was no need for a U.S. edition, the manufacturing clause having been suspended for Canadian authors since 1962. Like de la Roche’s *Jalna* books, Diefenbaker’s memoirs proved to be bestsellers for the company: 67,000 copies of volume 1 sold in the first six months (220), most of them, one assumes, to the Canadian market. Eayrs and Kane may have been similar in character, both sharing a passion for good books, but it must be conceded that other factors put them miles apart, factors that, for want of a better word, are often referred to as “structural”: laws, industrial norms, international relations, corporate ownership, and other aspects of society and the economy that transcend the individual.

Is biography the best way to pursue the history of publishing? Ultimately, this methodological question is the most significant issue raised by *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada*, because the method we choose determines what we see. Panofsky, to her credit, identifies this issue at the outset (9–11). Biography gives us the men and women and the choices they made. Literary criticism sifts the works for an artistic or political significance of continuing value. Bibliography foregrounds the books and emphasizes the structural forces that shaped them. The answer, of course, is that collectively we may do all three.

Works Cited

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