

“Vexed by the Crassness of Commerce”

Jane Rule’s Struggle for Literary Integrity and Freedom of Expression

Novelist, short story writer, activist, and contributor to the gay liberation periodical, *The Body Politic* (1971-1987), Jane Rule was unambiguous about what she believed her role as writer entailed and about the challenges of the profession. Even years later, when she withdrew from her public life as a professional writer,¹ she wrote to Margaret Hollingsworth about the “horrible vulnerability” of sending out work to an “indifferent” or judgmental audience. She concluded, however, that the “world’s judgment is not really the point; the making is” (Rule, Letter). Indeed, Rule strove to make an impact on socio-cultural conventions through her writing and worked hard to move beyond the limits imposed by the publishing industry to do so. She could make such a declaration to Hollingsworth because, by that point, she had considerable experience negotiating with both national and international publishers, agents, literary figures, and governmental institutions.

Her interactions with those involved in the publishing industry, the focus of this paper, especially underscore how she consistently struggled to safeguard her freedom of expression and her literary integrity over the span of her career. As Clarence Karr notes in *Authors and Audiences*, legends of such struggles have “a special appeal for Canadians, who take delight in seeing themselves as David confronting Goliath” (58). Yet the archival record shows that Rule undeniably and relentlessly laboured not only to publish her work but also to resist censorship in daily practice. Her negotiations with various publishing figures and institutions, such as those with Robert Weaver of CBC radio, Carol J. Meyer of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and

Chatelaine magazine, and with her literary agents over matters related to socio-cultural censorship partly suggest what they conceived their roles to be in the publication process. These negotiations also showcase Rule's part in redefining expectations and protocols that determined the value of her work, the degree to which her work was edited, and the venues in which her work appeared. In other words, she understood that how she told her stories was as important as where they were published. The disagreements with two of her agents, those with Willis Kingsley Wing and Kurt Hellmer, would become especially significant in catalyzing their business terms and in making plain what Rule demanded of her literary agents. These disagreements also reveal what she saw as integral to the professionalization of an author and to literary integrity.

Rule's negotiations with the publishing industry must be understood both in the context of where she worked and also the period in which she actively published, especially after 1956 when she moved to Canada from the United States, until 1990 when she announced her retirement from writing. As Janet B. Friskney and Carole Gerson note in their assessment of twentieth-century conditions for publishing in Canada, the country did not have a sufficient readership to sustain its writers financially. Writers were therefore compelled to resign "themselves to writing part-time" or to seek "to advance their work in the major English- and French-language markets of the United States and Europe" (131):

[T]hey not only had to negotiate different ideas of the social and cultural role of the writer generally, and of the Canadian author specifically, but also had to navigate the expectations of foreign as well as domestic publishers. (132)

Yet Rule would have experienced less difficulty in working with publishers abroad, since her first attempts at publishing were made while she was living in the United States; she would have therefore neither approached other US publishers as foreign nor regarded their expectations as unfamiliar. Instead, compared to her writing colleagues in Canada, she would have had a greater degree of awareness of publishing practices abroad.

Still, like other authors, she would have been obliged to negotiate with and distinguish between literary and popular markets, the latter being dominated by magazines. Mass-circulation magazines, which accepted both popular and literary forms of writing, were more lucrative than book publication; however, they also depended upon "advertising income, which was calculated on the basis of circulation" (132). Editors, who were reliant on "advertising revenue of brand-name products" to absorb their

costs, could not “afford to misinterpret their readers’ interests” and risk circulation numbers (Karr 59; Friskney and Gerson 132). Yet, as Karr shows, magazine fiction was disparaged by academics for being “formulistic and unworthy of the status of great literature”: it was accused “of being episodic, unsophisticated in plot and structure, often written to order, and eschewing the intellectual, the controversial, and the political while catering to a bland market of mass readers” (59). After moving to Canada, Rule would have discovered that the domestic magazine trade, which “came into being at the start of the Second World War,” was increasingly rendered more complex by the influx of imported magazines, mostly from the United States; these imported magazines paid writers considerably more than Canadian publications (Smith 261).² Even so, writers in Canada were expected to respond to the call for a high literary standard in both domestic and foreign magazines.³ Many writers thus turned to publishing venues outside the country, especially the United States where the literary market was considerably larger; even if the expectations remained the same, the remuneration was better.⁴

The novel in Canada had an entirely different set of expectations and problems, which Rule for the most part adroitly side-stepped by employing agents who usually found publishers outside of Canada first. Indeed, by mid twentieth-century, most writers in Canada submitted manuscripts to publishing companies abroad because of the limitations of the domestic publishing industry.⁵ Book publishers sometimes expected writers to adapt their work to “public taste” and, as such, were not so far removed in their practices from magazines (59). Writers were also more likely to be published by the likes of McClelland and Stewart if a British or American publisher first agreed to “share costs” (Friskney and Gerson 134). The situation in Canada began to change by the 1960s, at least in terms of support for the publication of work by domestic authors; at that time, “new infrastructure support, such as Canada Council programs” enabled writers to “create a fresh wave of literary excitement” (Friskney and Gerson 138). The effect showed itself in the emergence and thriving of smaller presses. By 1970, there were thirty-two small presses that were printing fifty or more English-language, Canadian-authored books; by 1980, the number of presses had leaped to eighty-nine (MacSkimming 247).

That “wave of literary excitement” was well past due for queer literature, which was trying to find its own way in the 1950s.⁶ Peter Dickinson’s *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada* is mindful of

how national literatures have their own “closets” and how received national orthodoxies assume a heteronormative literary canon: “the identificatory *lack* upon which Canadian literary nationalism has historically been constructed . . . is in large part facilitated by, if not wholly dependent upon, a critical refusal to come to grips with textual *superabundance* of a destabilizing and counter-normative sexuality” (4). Yet, as Donald W. McLeod notes in “Publishing Against the Grain,” by the 1950s in Canada, “explicitly gay male (and some lesbian) material” had not yet made a full literary appearance; instead, it surfaced in “regular gossip or tidbit columns,” which provided the foundation for “the beginnings of Canada’s gay and lesbian press” (326). Jim Egan, Canada’s pioneer gay activist, also wrote articles in the 1950s that explored serious issues related to homosexuality for the venue, *Justice Weekly*. By the 1970s, *Long Time Coming* had emerged from Montreal and *The Body Politic* from Toronto; Rule was a regular and significant contributor to the latter magazine. McLeod observes that its appearance confirmed the “strength and visibility” of the gay and lesbian community in Canada (326).

In the United States, at least, the flourishing of paperbacks in the 1950s allowed for “an underground literature of lesbianism” (Showalter 419). The freedom of choice for women in terms of their subject matter, however, remained limited. As Elaine Showalter notes about American fiction, “[i]f the kitchen was the only room of her own for the American Eve . . . [I]t was a prison, and women writers were due for a break” (421). Her assessment of American fiction might provide some parallels for what was happening in Canada. As John Morgan Gray of Macmillan Canada, for example, noted about the domestic industry in the 1950s, the “big decisions, editorial and commercial, [were] made in New York and London and in the interest of his author a Canadian editor dare not forget it” (qtd. in Friskney and Gerson 135). By the 1960s, the various liberation movements in both countries related to race, sex, and gender began to affect the production of literature as a whole (Showalter 422). If poetry remained the most “effective medium for social, political, and cultural transformation,” the novel was “generally slower than poetry to react to historical change” (423). Longer fiction was just beginning to register the “inchoate frustrations of women in the years leading up to the second wave of feminism” (424).⁷

In both her magazine fiction and her novels, Rule explored such “inchoate frustrations”—and met with the same in terms of publishing her work. She had initially tried to publish without literary agents but quickly turned to

them for assistance. Writers working in Canada in the period rarely had agents. As Douglas Gibson notes:

When I started out [in March 1968], there was one literary agent at The Canadian Speakers' and Writers' Service in Canada, and some Canadian authors had New-York based agents but most people we dealt with didn't have agents. And then, through the 1970s, and more specifically through the 1980s, a number of literary agencies sprang up. (Evain 80)⁸

Well before the 1970s, Rule was one of the few authors in Canada to have an agent in New York. Indeed, in 1954, just before she moved to Canada from the United States, she made her first unsuccessful attempt to secure one. As the archival record shows, Russell & Volkening of New York refused to represent Rule because "we cannot . . . work well with material in which we don't have a very considerable confidence."⁹

Her first long-term business relationship with an agent began shortly thereafter and set the conditions for virtually all subsequent publishing-related interactions. She began to work with Willis Kingsley Wing, who sent out her stories to both popular and literary magazines. Wing was associated with A.P. Watt and Son of London, Britain's top agency (Karr 77).¹⁰ His professional relationship with Rule commenced around early 1957, when Rule began to pursue the professionalization of her career more actively; that relationship dwindled by August of 1962. Under his purview, she published her short stories in several magazines, including *Redbook* and *Chatelaine*, which were oriented towards working women and mothers. He was followed by Hope Leresche, of Hope Leresche & Steele, in October 1962,¹¹ and by Kurt Hellmer, who represented Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt, among others.¹² These two agents attended to the publication of her first novel, *Permanent Resident* (later titled *Desert of the Heart* [1964]). In May 1966, Hellmer was replaced by her last and most successful American agent, Georges Borchardt, whom Leresche had recommended to her. Co-founded with his wife, Anne Borchardt, Borchardt's agency was established in New York in 1967 and also dealt with French writers like Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu.¹³ Her success with the last agency is registered by how some (although not all) of Rule's manuscripts found publication with greater ease than *Desert of the Heart*, although such ease might also be attributed to her improved reputation as a writer and changes in the politics of the international literary market.¹⁴

At the same time as Rule increasingly and cooperatively worked with agents, she also worked independently of them.¹⁵ She often dealt directly with publishers or publication venues; three telling exchanges, which

occurred decades apart, might be seen to characterize the range of her editorial and publishing relationships. The first of these was with Robert Weaver, the renowned CBC Radio broadcaster, literary editor, and anthologist. Her association with Weaver commenced virtually at the same time as she began working with Wing, who eventually mediated some of the interactions with Weaver for the payment for her stories.¹⁶ Rule had sent Weaver a tape-recording of one of her stories, “A Walk By Himself,”¹⁷ which initiated an awkward exchange related to his mistaking her for a man. His error was engendered by the pitch of her voice in the recording and exacerbated by how she signed her letters at the time, as “Jinx Rule.”

In the same letter in which he addressed her as “Mr. Rule,” he answered a question that for Rule was almost consistently at the forefront of her concerns—that related to censorship. In answer to a question she raised, he wrote on March 28, 1957, to say that CBC Radio had “very few taboos.” In fact, he noted that they had broadcast “a number of stories which magazines would not consider because of their themes”:

However, a few years ago, there was a good deal of protest from listeners about the use of certain four-letter words in CBC drama and short story readings and we agreed at that time to cut out this kind of language instead of running the risk of possible censorship of the themes themselves. In other words, I think we would have to cut a few of the expressions you have used in your short story.

In response, Rule corrected his mistaken impression about her gender; she then commented upon how pleased she was by CBC’s handling of the matter of censorship, even though her story was not broadcast with *Anthology*: “Yours seems to me a very sane policy. . . . If you can manage large audiences, offering them good stuff with only occasional cutting of four letter words, you’re doing a wonderful job.”¹⁸ It was largely an amicable relationship because they shared similar views about censorship and editing. That relationship remained consistent even after Weaver rejected her next three stories, “The Chosen Two,” “My Father’s House,” and “Her Own Funeral.” The archival record shows that it was approximately two years later, on January 19, 1959, when Weaver would accept one of her stories, “On the Way.”¹⁹

The second of these exchanges was a revealing one with *Chatelaine*, which took place in the late 1960s. As Valerie J. Korinek argues in *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*, the magazine had become more intensely focused on feminist and political issues during the 1950s and had thus shifted from its earlier espousal of apparently more traditional feminine roles. In spite of claims of greater political liberation,

which was credited to the editorial interventions of Doris Anderson, its conservative legacy was to continue to show itself.²⁰ *Chatelaine* hosted a contest in 1968, the rules of which foreclosed any opportunity for Rule to submit her short story. In a letter dated September 15th of that year, Rule wrote to the “Mrs. Chatelaine Contest” to explain that, although she had “read the directions” to the contest, she had deliberately and flagrantly defied their prescriptive questionnaire. She noted that the questionnaire had disqualified her because “I’m not single. I’m not married.”²¹ Rule was referring to the contest form, which asked for the name of the submitter’s “mate” and for the occupation and income of the said “mate.” Rule’s partner was Helen Sonthoff.

To their request for such information, she made the rejoinder: “This magazine does a much better job with articles and with stories than lots of its kind. It could put some imaginative effort into questionnaires [sic] as well.” She added that she was therefore voicing her protest by “disrespectfully submitting my entry.”²² After supplying the requisite information for the contest, Rule proceeded to object “disrespectfully” by offering an additional five pages of information, including the following: her occupation and annual income; her favourite company menus (many of which, as she claimed, were pilfered from the *Ten Minute Gourmet Cookbook*); and her “Special Projects.” The latter, she explained, involved working against such questionnaires:

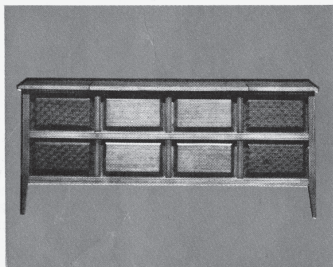
Late at night I sometimes answer form questions, to test my own sense of identity against the identity I’m supposed to have, to test my own life against the life I’m supposed to lead. It’s more of a hobby than a research project, but it keeps me in touch with how hard I have to work in order to write clear, hopeful little love songs to Mrs. Chatelaine because she’s the one who sends the checks for the kids and I like to participate in the larger community.

As Rule wrote in her covering letter, “You don’t have to imagine me. I’ve done it for you.” Her “Conclusions” also explored the implications of the contest’s stipulations. Contestants, it would seem, were obliged to model themselves upon prevalent notions of marriage, heterosexuality, and family life: the contest was not, as it proclaimed, “open to all home makers in Canada,” but only those “with husbands and ‘real’ children.” In so doing, *Chatelaine* had predetermined who might publish with them well before considering the literary merit of the work. On this occasion, it became primarily the *Chatelaine* contest form to which she was reacting, although it became clear later that her literary material was not always consonant with their publishing agenda either. A letter from Winthrop Watson, a representative for Georges Borchardt, indicates that even a decade later her material was

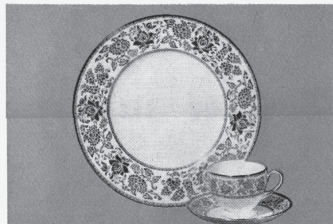
Are you Mrs. Chatelaine?

Win our
\$1,000
contest

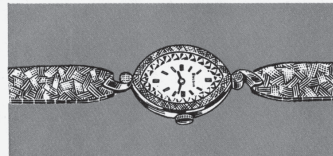
PLUS THESE PRIZES



From Electrohome, the Dimension S610 stereo with push-button control panel.

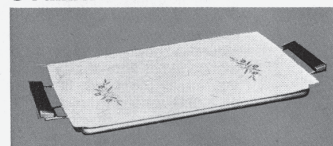


56-piece set, Damask Gold bone china, Josiah Wedgwood and Sons (Canada) Ltd.



A lady's beautiful 17-jewel wristwatch from Bulova Watch Company Limited.

9 runners-up prizes



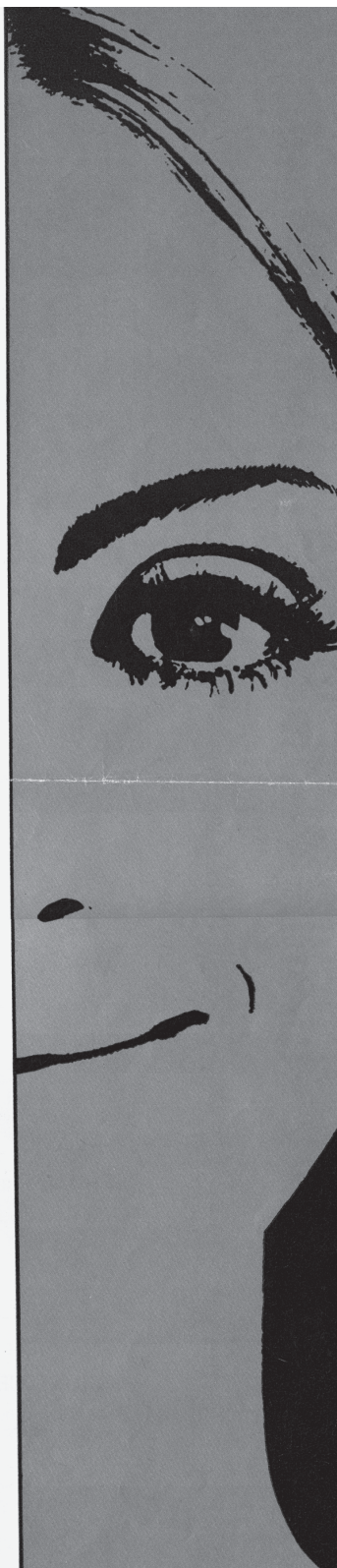
Nine runners-up across Canada will each receive an attractive Corning Ware Broil-Bake tray and chrome-plated serving cradle, Corning Glass Works of Canada Limited.

How to enter

1. Check the rules and be sure to follow them exactly.
2. Give these facts on the top sheet of 8½-by-11-inch paper:
 - a. Your full name, address.
 - b. Your height, weight, age. (Attach a black-and-white or color snapshot of yourself, taken within the last six months.)
 - c. Your husband's name, occupation, annual income (we're not being nosy—this helps to show us how well you manage).
 - d. List your children's names and ages.
 - e. If you don't do all your own housework, say what paid help you employ.
3. Tell how often you entertain. Give a favorite company menu and the recipe for one particular dish you like serving to company.
4. Give a typical menu for a day's meals for your family (if someone packs a lunch, include that with your menu, too).
5. Say what type of home you have (apartment, bungalow, two-story) in the city, suburbs or country, and tell either why it suits your family to a T just as it is, or outline the changes and improvements that you feel are important to undertake.
6. Tell what special projects you enjoy (gourmet cooking, sewing, sports, study, music, crafts, hobbies, etc.), and give a brief example of one such project completed recently.
7. List your community activities (church, school, service, civic), with your positions in them, past and present.
8. Write a one-page description of your hopes for your children, and how you are laying the groundwork for their future.
9. Explain in a few paragraphs what you believe a wife should contribute to marriage and family life.

Rules

1. The contest is open to all homemakers living in Canada, except Maclean-Hunter personnel and their families.
2. Entries must be postmarked not later than October 31, 1968.
3. Clip out this page and enclose it with your entry.
4. Use 8½-by-11-inch paper, and write on one side only. Start each section of the contest (2 to 9 above) on a fresh sheet.
5. When you have answered the questions, attach snapshots, this page, separate sheets, etc., and mail to Mrs. Chatelaine Contest, Chatelaine Magazine, 481 University Avenue, Toronto 2.
6. All entries and pictures become the property of Chatelaine and CANNOT BE RETURNED.
7. If you are the winner, you must be able to arrange for a week early in 1969 for interviews and photographs, either in Toronto or at home.
8. Results of the contest and the story of the winner will be published in our May 1969 issue.



being refused on conventional grounds. Barbara West at *Chatelaine* had written to him to say that “we have a very conservative readership that would not readily accept a story with a theme of this kind. Many of our readers would not understand it, and those [who] did would probably be offended.”²³ If she had offended *Chatelaine* during these exchanges, she was not prevented from publishing several other stories with them over the span of close to fifteen years,²⁴ nor from being asked to judge one of their fiction contests in March 1978.²⁵

The last of these exemplary exchanges independent of her agents occurred in the 1970s. Rule was publishing more easily with *Chatelaine*; however, she still on occasion found it difficult to locate publishers for her longer manuscripts. Showalter’s sense of the conservative cultural politics that affected the publication of novels rather than magazine fiction shows itself here. Employed at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich as an editor, Carol J. Meyer was an ardent admirer of Rule. She herself declared as much in a letter dated December 21, 1979: “Your books have been an absolute staple in my life.”²⁶ In 1979, Rule submitted the manuscript for *Outlander* (1981) to Meyer, who believed that it was a “book I am not going to be able to take on.” In part, her refusal to do so was related to the genre of the book—“collections [of stories and essays] don’t sell.” She also observed that

I don’t think HBJ is quite ready for it. They are advanced enough to publish a novel with homosexual themes, but I think this might be a bit much. . . .

Outlander is certainly *not erotica*, but so much of the book has to do with lesbian sexuality that I doubt that the more “straight” publishers (and here I am using the word to mean conventional) will know what to do with it.

Although Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, founded in 1919, worked to become more politically open, Meyer admitted that it remained politically conservative and that it would require a champion of Rule’s work *within* the organization to push forward the book’s publication (Tebbel 1981, 179). She was initially unprepared to take on that role: “I don’t think I have the courage to make so direct a political statement, and I don’t think the other people on the staff would be comfortable enough with the material to do a good job of publishing the book without an editor who is willing to be ferocious and insistent.”²⁷ Only a few days later, on April 22, 1980, Meyer inexplicably changed her mind again. She declared that, with respect to the “risks involved in sponsoring this book, I have no problem with that now. . . . I had problems with the collection, because I felt guilty and insecure, but I definitely do not feel that way about this one.”

These exchanges became more crucial in relation to her agents because Rule regarded them as champions and protectors of her work when other publishing figures or institutions did not deal with it as she wished. Generally, agents are seen as important to “various facets of publishing—from publishing contracts to advertising campaigns for books to public relations for authors” (Gillies 7). As Mary Ann Gillies notes in *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920*, the emergent figure of the agent responded to authors’ financial considerations and needs. George Fetherling characterizes agents as “professional bargainers”: “they allow the relationship between author and publisher to remain positive and creative, unvexed by the crassness of commerce” (668). Rule was irked, however, by the prioritizing of financial considerations over what she perceived as unnecessary or detrimental editing of her work. She herself came to attribute at least four responsibilities to the literary agent: first, act as audience of, witness to, and critic of the literary text; second, understand the various kinds of markets to which a writer may appeal and then locate the most appropriate publishing venue for the work at hand; third, negotiate the economic terms for the literary work; and fourth, but perhaps most crucially, protect the moral imperatives of the literary text by guarding the latter from textual editing, expurgation, or any other form of censorship. It was this latter point that was to be most contentious.

Rule began to work with her first agent, Willis Kingsley Wing, around early 1957. Her relationship with Wing was initially characterized by the fundamentals of agent-writer relationships: the working out of economic details related to appropriate markets and venues for the publication of her short stories. It was also distinguished by the frank and open remarks that Wing made about the literary merit and quality of the work she submitted for the purposes of finding suitable publishers. He managed negotiations for publication in magazines that included *Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Playboy*; book publishers that included Faber & Faber, Doubleday, Random House, and McGraw-Hill; and radio programs that included *Anthology*, the CBC program directed by Weaver. Wing also anticipated the challenges Rule would encounter, as a letter dated December 16, 1957, suggests: the “kind of short fiction that interests you as you discovered in your relations with editors before showing your work to us is hard to market. Even with the most successful story the market is desperately narrow.” He thus suggested she shift her attention to longer fiction.²⁸

With respect to literary quality, he commented freely in several letters, as in a letter dated April 11, 1957.²⁹ Therein he noted that one story, “My

Father's House," was "uneven," "wordy," and "lack[ing in] direction," and that the dialogue of the characters was at times "irritating and pretentious." He suggested that another story, "The Coward," conveyed "dark emotional depths" without "explain[ing] them clearly": "Unless the story is meaningful and is clear in its meanings the reader is going to feel cheated." In making such remarks, however, Wing also made another intriguing observation related to the two markets *between* which Rule seemed to have landed. He considered these same stories "too literary for the popular markets and not quite authoritative enough for the other markets such as the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Mademoiselle* and so on. It seems to me your principal need is to work out motivation and the end results of your interesting characterization." The novel, it seemed, was the direction in which he was gently encouraging Rule to move.

His insistence that Rule appeal to one market or the other, however, raised alarms, for he found himself placating her in his subsequent letter, dated April 30, 1957: "I'm not urging plot and motivation on you for the sake of adherence to existing forms or patterns. We have trouble in this business with semantics." Even at this early juncture, his remarks reveal that Rule refused to adhere to "existing forms and patterns" and that she wanted to develop new ones. He eventually shifted from offering criticism to placating her or showing support for her work. By way of encouragement, he noted that "I think you are in the process now of finding out exactly what you can do best and if the target isn't hit every time, you can reassure yourself that this is not an uncommon experience."³⁰ When he himself was not available to give such direct support for or attention to her work, his colleagues strove "to do the best for [their] authors in the British market without detailed instructions from [him]."³¹

He was especially careful to assert his authority in financial matters. On April 8, 1957, he came to understand that she had been working with Weaver to have "A Walk By Himself" read over the radio. He advised her that, even if she retained publication rights, "major magazines would not want to publish after a radio program had used the story." In all such instances, Wing remarked that he ought to be referred to "for contract negotiations."³² In other words, however Rule may have conceived of his role, Wing emphasized that he had the final say over her financial contract. In another letter, dated July 8, 1957, he reminded her that, even if she submitted stories independently to magazines in the Canadian market, the agency was still entitled to commissions from her publications:

As to the Canadian market and the question of submitting your stories there yourself, you might like to know that the editors of *Chatelaine* and *Maclean's* are clients of this office and that we have quite wide contacts in Canada, but, of course, if you prefer marketing your manuscripts there we have no especial objection on the understanding that it does not affect our commission position.

Clearly, Rule was still learning the protocols related to financial agreements and markets when publishing through an agency. Later, within the course of their developing business association, she came to define such protocols by elevating her concerns about censorship above any financial reward that might involve compromising the integrity of her work.

Tensions showed themselves on November 25, 1958, when Wing wrote that “we could do a lot better if you could enjoy the give and take of a personal conversation.” There is even an element of defensiveness in his letter: “[w]e’ve invested quite a bit of time and money in your affairs and I should like to continue but don’t feel any obligation.” Clearly, Rule was sufficiently appeased by his remarks because her ire was not roused again until about two years later when the editor of *Housewife* magazine,³³ Alan Wykes, was granted permission by a London-based representative of the Wing agency to condense her story, “Your Father and I.”³⁴ Wing quoted a letter from his London associates sent on January 16, 1961, wherein he stated that, as it was “Wykes who [was] doing the work, [he saw] no cause for objection.” Apparently, Wykes had an established reputation with the magazine and within the industry. Wing himself therefore had believed “this to be sufficient assurance.”³⁵ He claimed that “all our dealings through our agent in London with British magazines have, on the whole, been satisfactory up to now. British editors have always had the right to anglicize stories of North American origin up to a reasonable point.”

In a letter dated September 9, 1961, Rule angrily observed that those apparently “satisfactory” dealings extended well beyond anglicizing her story to making excisions of “over a thousand words. In a six thousand word short story such cutting can hardly be considered minor.” She proceeded to list the changes made, which were the result of “poor judgment and poor taste.” He had, for example, changed the setting of the story from Reno to Exeter, altered idiomatic expressions, and made egregious stylistic changes. The change in the setting, she observes, “posed such difficult problems, Mr. Wykes solved most of them by simply dropping out the central section of the story, the trip across the country which develops the tensions between the husband and wife and reveals something important of the daughter’s trouble.” Rule also observed that he had altered the speaking passages of the

main character, Richard, who no longer simply said “something” but “murmured” or said “gently.”³⁶

Rule then insisted that, since the damage to her published story was irrevocable, she receive greater assurances that “no contract of mine is made for me that allows any alteration of my work without my specific permission.” She scarcely waited for his response before she wrote a follow-up letter (of the same date),³⁷ in which she addressed Wing’s belief that she had “jumped to the conclusion that it was [his] contract arrangements that made this handling of the story possible.” As she noted, the “contract was vague enough to allow Mr. Wykes to make the radical changes he did” presumably because, as Rule noted ironically, “Mr. Wykes has a good reputation as a responsible editor”:

It seems to me that you take a pretty fantastic risk in setting up a contract that gives an editor these liberties without permission of an author. I don’t see how it could protect an author from gross misrepresentation. Or do you think this handling of a story not a gross representation? . . . I cannot feel easy about other contract arrangements unless you can assure me that . . . *no* alteration, no matter how small, will be made without my permission.

Wing explained that magazine proofs were conventionally not given the same attention as those for novels. He also assured her “we will be especially insistent to see that such a problem doesn’t arise again.”

Even so, he noted that her “faith” in their work was “very easily shaken”: “I treasure my reputation greatly but if you and I can’t agree on it, I haven’t the slightest desire to continue with your work.”³⁸ In the course of one year, Rule indeed would no longer treasure his reputation as much as Wing did: this editorial fiasco was a sticking point with her and their working relationship was over by August 16, 1962. Wing’s surviving letter indicates that Rule felt that his agency neither adequately represented her nor protected her interests: “In view of your doubts about the Watt office in the British field and ourselves in North America,” he coldly remarked, “I think there is no value whatever in continuing.” He argued that the flourishing of an “agency relationship” required “mutual trust, good faith, and an agreement to work happily together.” Since Rule had lost faith in Wing’s ability to market and protect her work properly, she decided to give another agency the opportunity to fare better.

By early October 1962, Rule began working with the next agency, Hope Leresche & Steele, formerly the Sayle Literary Agency.³⁹ The relationship was almost an instantly successful one, especially if one considers that by November 1962 Leresche had secured Secker & Warburg as the publisher

for her first novel—*Permanent Resident* (later titled *Desert of the Heart* [1964]). Leresche also negotiated the rights for her book with the Canadian publisher, Macmillan. Leresche's American counterpart did not do so well. In the first few months, Kurt Hellmer and Rule had a seemingly happy working relationship. Like Wing, he and his assistant, Sally Nicklas, offered critical insights into her work. Both were enthusiastic about her novel, *Permanent Resident*. In discussing its publication, Hellmer made remarks that reflect the publishing conditions of the period: Macmillan "might be interested in a book, but it is doubtful they would go to the expense of producing it themselves. Canada is just too small a territory to make publishing pay."⁴⁰ Yet Macmillan agreed to publish the novel the same year as Secker & Warburg.

Some of their interactions showcase how satisfactorily Hellmer operated as the protector that Rule desired for her work. She was apprehensive regarding the delayed publication of the American version of *Desert of the Heart* given some of her previous experiences with *Housewife*. She admitted that she must "sound more like a patient nervous about an operation than a writer about to have a book published."⁴¹ Some of these heightened anxieties and preoccupations revolved around minutiae: "the use of commas in separating adjectives."⁴² But she understandably also wanted reassurance that no editing would be done to *Desert of the Heart* without her prior knowledge and approval. Hellmer wrote on November 18, 1962 to suggest that she need not worry "since you will receive the copy-edited manuscript before it is [sent] to the printers, thus assuring you that no changes [will be] made with which you might not agree." Even so, she was worried because Aaron Asher of World Publishing Company, which had agreed to publish *Desert of the Heart* in the United States, was refusing to alter a contract that accommodated Rule's concerns. So again she wrote directly to Hellmer on November 21, 1962: "I would like you to do what you can to persuade him to accept my second suggestion, either the repeating of the sentence already written into the contract or a sentence like 'All copy editing is subject to the final approval of the author' to be placed at the end of the copy editing clause." Happily, he could write by November 26 that her first suggested change—the omission of two words related to unauthorized editing—stood "the way you have changed it."

Even Leresche impressed Rule in terms of operating as a protector of the literary text. Indeed, in terms of her first novel, the editing was virtually non-existent. Aside from concerns Secker & Warburg articulated about libel laws because of some correlatives between her fictional characters and place

names, and real persons and place names in Las Vegas, there was only one inquiry. As Rule recalls:

[O]ne of the characters, Evelyn, says “my husband and I” quite self consciously, and then says “feeling like the Queen of England in her Christmas message.” The printer had underlined this, and had written in the margin: “Is this offensive to the Queen?” I wrote underneath, “No.” And that is the only critical exchange I had about that book.⁴³

She felt, however, the concerns about libel laws were still “not the ordinary exercises of an author preparing a book for publication. In the early 1960s, novels were not being published about erotic relationships between women.”⁴⁴ Rule’s sense of the market was far from incorrect, as Showalter has shown; yet the conservatism that persisted in the period did not substantively affect her novel.

After the initial period of harmony with Hellmer, problems emerged. The first real conflict with him surfaced approximately one year into their professional relationship, on August 15, 1963. She had received the September 1963 issue of *Redbook*, a literary magazine that had redefined itself in 1951 to appeal to post-Second World War women and mothers (Tebbel 1991). Her story, “No More Bargains” which had appeared in that issue, had suffered from significant grammatical changes and egregious omissions for which she had not given approval.⁴⁵ In profound agitation, she wrote to Hellmer to castigate him for allowing such modifications to have been made without giving her any warning:

A copy of the September issue of REDBOOK arrived this morning, forwarded from your office. As I read through the story NO MORE BARGAINS, I discovered that it had not only been cut but also revised since I last saw it, and it is . . . a butcher’s job. The cutting in the first scene, for instance, makes the whole scene meaningless, a waste of space. As for the revisions, there are some real corkers, sentences turned into blatant nonsense, straight statement turned into appalling cliché. Additions like “For suddenly she knew” belong to a category (sic) of errors that I should think even true confession magazines would be ashamed to admit. There is no point in my making a list of the numerous changes in which the editor achieves such brilliant grammatical clarity as having the juice and coffee stand up instead of the man drinking them.⁴⁶

In part, Rule’s indignation was rooted in her sense that, as an instructor at the University of British Columbia, she had a standard related to good writing to uphold: “I teach at a university. I teach English. I teach writing . . . [E]xplaining to my colleagues and students that I didn’t make [these errors], that they were made for me, doesn’t help. Any responsible writer does not allow himself to be so used.” Although these reasons were enough to support

her case against unapproved revisions or omissions, a number of other issues surfaced as she and Hellmer brandished fiery words over the incident.

The disputes with Hellmer escalated because he insisted upon showing fidelity to the existing markets rather than to Rule herself. So, on October 16, 1963, in a searing letter to Hope Leresche, Rule wrote about her resentment of editorial interventions, especially about how Hellmer had failed to protect her from them: "He has done everything he could to avoid making a statement which would require him to arrange contracts that limited editorial rights. Apparently . . . he feels he would be too limited by such restrictions because he keeps using vague phrases designed to placate me without binding him to any real agreement."⁴⁷ Such a response derived from her deep conviction in literary integrity. The changes to "No More Bargains" were disconcerting because they affected the story's content, what Rule saw as embodying the "moral vision" of a work. These changes, moreover, were made to accommodate material interests—an advertisement for vacuum cleaners. As Rule went on to note, "[o]ne has to keep bad editing, and vacuum cleaners, in their place."⁴⁸

So she became increasingly tenacious and rigorous, insisting that Hellmer acquiesce to her conception of the role he ought to play, even enlisting the aid of a lawyer to "make it impossible for my New York agent to sell any of my work without adequate protection from irresponsible editing."⁴⁹ Over the *Redbook* incident, she thereafter vehemently insisted on allegiance to her interests: "if cutting and rewriting are done without my permission . . . both you and I have legal recourse. Is it that you don't think you can get magazine editors to agree to these restrictions? If you can't, if such restrictions tie your hands in the markets you are primarily interested in, then you have a real problem, one you can't solve with me, and we should stop trying to do business." Here Rule identifies one of the key issues of their disagreement—his limited knowledge of or engagement with markets, which she supposed had superseded her own.⁵⁰ In frustration, she wrote directly to the editor of *Redbook*, Barbara Blakemore, who eventually agreed to allow Rule to "have the final word" on her forthcoming work and, in announcing such a triumph to Hellmer, she argued that "I must maintain final responsibility for my own work. . . . I want legal control in your hands and mine, not in theirs." Declaring that "[y]ou are useless to me as an agent unless you can give me protection against this butchering," she drew a line. Evidently, he crossed it again, for she replaced him on Laresche's recommendation with her last and most successful agent, Georges Borchardt, on May 29, 1966.

When she did negotiate her contract with Borchardt, she was careful to note that she would only settle with an agent “who is not only interested in my work but [who] also accepts the limitations I want for contracts and places of publication”:

I cannot accept any agreement [that] takes final responsibility of my work out of my hands. . . . Some agents I have talked to found this restriction unrealistic, and from the point of view of number of sales I am sure it is, but I am not willing to have my work published in any other way.⁵¹

Borchardt accepted Rule on these terms, notwithstanding the “limitations” that suggest that she was more interested in an agent who protected her rights rather than one who secured the most lucrative contract.⁵²

She consistently put freedom of expression ahead of financial reward in her interactions with publishing figures and especially with her agents. The subsequent breakdown of her relationship first with Wing and then with Hellmer was thus related to their inability to conform to her expectations of the agent’s role: to protect her work from unauthorized editing. In Hellmer’s case, it was also related to his apparent unwillingness to locate new spaces for her sometimes “ill-fitting” fiction and his subsequent failure to negotiate an appropriate venue for Rule’s longer fiction. When he argued that popular magazines conventionally had the last say in publishing material, Rule disproved his theory by eliciting a completely different response from Blakemore. Even when she tried more conventional routes or popular markets, Rule was adamant about pushing the boundaries of what might have been deemed acceptable.⁵³ As she herself discovered in her subsequent publishing negotiations, her literary freedom was circumscribed by both overt and implicit expectations about who could make claims to being an author, what interests would govern the shaping of that material (economic and otherwise), what public spaces sanctioned her literary material, and what an author might be authorized to write about. Ultimately, these competing expectations and interests affected knowledge and literary production in the period, expectations and interests that Rule consistently challenged throughout the span of her literary career.

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NOTES

- 1 Rule decided to stop writing after 1990, although some of her work was published posthumously: see, for example, *Loving the Difficult* (Sidney, BC: Hedgerow, 2008). The reasons for her retirement seem to be related to her debilitating arthritis (see Schuster 6).
- 2 See the letter by Rosemary Macomber (of the Borchardt agency) to Jane Rule on July 6, 1972, in which she praises the Canada Council and deplors how *Canadian Forum* does not pay its writers: "I consider this a very poor indication of the regard Canada has for its writer" (Box 21, File titled *Copies of Other Stories*, Jane Rule Fonds, UBC Archives).
- 3 See Smith, who notes that "Canadian pulp magazines existed within a cultural hierarchy that proved itself to be trans-national, and the lack of difference between the production of pulp fiction in Canada and its production in the United States suggested that the two nations shared many social and cultural characteristics that prompted political anxiety in Canada on a national scale" (262).
- 4 Mass-market magazine fiction flourished in post-war Canada.
- 5 Since "neither Canadian literary fiction nor poetry had much international appeal," publishers in Canada were more wary about engaging the material submitted by Canadian authors and only did so at great risk on their part (Friskney and Gerson 134).
- 6 Even in 1952, when George H. Doran wrote *Chronicles of Barabbas, 1884-1934*, his chapter on "The Exotics" is revealing of how he and others in the publishing industry might have approached queer culture: he remarked on the "exotics [who] profit[ed] by the decadence of an overstimulated and blasé social order" (267).
- 7 Her book, *Lesbian Images*, for example, was commissioned by Doubleday in the 1970s.
- 8 See also George Fetherling's entry "Literary Agents" in *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (668).
- 9 25 June 1954, Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds, UBC Archives.
- 10 A.P. Watt claimed he had "invented the business when he established A.P. Watt & Co" (130). He represented writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Conan Doyle (Tebbel 1981, 131).
- 11 In a letter from Rule to Ellen Kay, dated October 23, 1963, Rule discusses how she reached an agreement with Leresche "only about three weeks ago to have her handle my work in England and on the continent while Kurt Hellmer dealt with the States and Canada." Box 19, File 4. Jane Rule Fonds, UBC Archives.
- 12 Hellmer had fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and came to settle in New York where by the 1940s he became a literary agent (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Hellmer). 04 April 2010. Web.
- 13 <http://www.gbagency.com/about.html>. 04 April 2010. Web. His agency continues to represent her work.
- 14 Publishing in Canada had also improved by the early 1970s as a result of some government support, both federally and provincially. See Robin Farr's "Government Looks All Around."
- 15 See Willis Kingsley Wing's letter to Jane Rule. 30 April 1957. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds, UBC Archives.
- 16 See Robert Weaver's letter to Jane Rule. 21 January 1959. Vol 4. File 27 (1957-1982). MG31 D162. National Archives of Canada.
- 17 The letters exchanged between Rule and Weaver do not clearly indicate which story was taped for consideration for *Anthology*; but, in a letter in August 1957, Weaver makes reference to "A Walk By Himself," that "earlier" story she had submitted for his consideration.
- 18 Rule to Weaver. 1 April 1957. Vol 4. File 27 (1957-1982). Robert Weaver Fonds.

- 19 In an undated letter that follows, Rule speaks of how two-thirds of the story was read over the air before it was “censored by a lord high someone or other. . . . The CBC accepted the story, asked for a rewrite, which was also accepted, broadcast it over two thirds of Canada, then cut it off. I want to know why.” There is no letter of response in the archives. Vol 4. File 27 (1957-1982). MG31 D162. National Archives of Canada. The story was subsequently published in *Klanak Islands* (see Jane Rule Fonds Catalogue, Box 13, File 4. Jane Rule Fonds).
- 20 See Korinek. Also see “Chatelaine: We’re Celebrating 80 Years.”
- 21 Rule to “Mrs. Chatelaine Contest.” 15 September 1968. Box 23, File 1. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 22 Rule to “Mrs. Chatelaine Contest.” 15 September 1968. Box 23, File 1. Jane Rule Fonds. It is unclear whether or not Rule actually also submitted a story with her entry form; the Fonds hold her five-page response, but there is no indication of a story having been submitted.
- 23 Winthrop Watson to Rule. 30 April 1979. Box 21. File titled “Georges Borchardt.” Jane Rule Fonds.
- 24 Rule’s stories appeared in April 1969 (“The List”), August 1972 (“The Secretary Bird”), December 1976 (“The Delicate Balance”), August 1977 (“Joy”), December 1979 (“A Migrant Christmas”), and May 1981 (“Seaweed and Song”). Box 37, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 25 “Jane Rule, Winner Fiction Competition.” *Miss Chatelaine* 15.2 (March 1978). Box 37, File 10. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 26 Meyer to Rule. 21 December 1979. Box 21. File titled “Harcourt Brace.” Jane Rule Fonds.
- 27 Meyer to Rule. 26 February 1980. Box 21, File titled “Harcourt Brace.” Jane Rule Fonds.
- 28 Willis Kingsley Wing to Rule. 22 July 1958, Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 29 Wing to Rule. 11 April 1957. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 30 As for the apparent lack of speed in dealing with her manuscripts, he noted: “If you take your responsibilities to your authors seriously, careful reading and evaluation of manuscripts added to all the business activities that involve us, the time factor becomes a somewhat different thing.” Wing to Rule. 6 January 1958. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 31 Wing to Rule. 28 February 1958, Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 32 Wing to Rule. 8 April 1957, Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 33 *Housewife* was a monthly glossy magazine produced by Hulton Press in the 1950s.
- 34 A copy of the typed manuscript is housed in the Jane Rule Fonds, Box 13, File Five. I have not yet been able to locate a copy of the story as it was printed in *Housewife* magazine.
- 35 Wing to Rule. 1 September 1961, Jane Rule Fonds.
- 36 Rule to Wing. 9 September 1961. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 37 It is not clear whether or not Rule sent both of these letters to Wing.
- 38 Wing to Rule. 30 August 1961. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 39 Hope Leresche and Richard Steele took over the Sayle Literary Agency (founded by JB Pinker) in the 1970s and renamed it after themselves. (It is now back to Sayle Literary Agency. *British Books Today: Literary Agents*. Web.10 April 2010.)
- 40 31 October 1962. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 41 Rule to Hellmer. 21 November 1963. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 42 Benjamin La Farge, Associate Editor, to Rule. 18 February 1965. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 43 “Jane Rule: The Woman Behind *Lesbian Images*.” *Body Politic* (December 1975): 14. See also unpublished interview with Jane Rule, by Linda Morra. December 2006.
- 44 “Censorship.” Box 25, File 6. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 45 As one example, in the opening line of the story, the protagonist, Kate, is described as waking from a “damp, guilty dream”; the final printed story removed the words “damp, guilty.” See typed ms. of “No More Bargains” in “Short Stories & Essays - Published and Unpublished.” Box 12, File 14. Jane Rule Fonds.

- 46 Rule to Hellmer. Box 19, File 7. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 47 Rule to Hope Leresche. 16 October 1963. Box 22, File 1. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 48 This quotation and an account of the censoring process of the story that appeared in *Redbook* has been taken from an essay by Hofsess, titled “Jane Rule’s Wisdom of the Heart.” Box 21, File 32. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 49 Rule to Ellen Kay. November 8, 1963. Box 19, File 5. Jane Rule Fonds, UBC Archives.
- 50 In fact, in the December 2007 interview, she claimed to know nothing of markets, but to write for herself—markets, she asserted, belong to the agent’s field of knowledge.
- 51 Rule to Georges Borchardt. 29 May 1966. Box 21, File 6. Jane Rule Fonds.
- 52 Rule to Borchardt. 29 May 1966. Box 21, File 6. Jane Rule Fonds. In the same letter, she stipulated that the newly-acquired agent was to look into the World Publishing Company with which she had placed her first novel, *Desert of the Heart*, and advise her about what do with her novel, *This is Not for You*: “World’s handling of the book . . . doesn’t give me a great deal of confidence in their efficiency. What I need is the advice of someone who does know what would be wisest to do with this new book.”
- 53 As Marilyn Schuster notes, her struggles “nonetheless enable[d] her to devise strategies of resistance and subversion” (2).

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