

THE UNIVERSITY PRESSES

Ian Montagnes

IN THE MIDST of the crises and passions that have characterized so much of Canadian book publishing in recent years — the branch-plant infestation, the foreign takeovers, the threatened bankruptcies, the jingoism, the innuendoes of muscle and “families” in mass-market paperback distribution — the country’s university presses have proceeded quietly with their work. Almost stodgily, it might seem. There is little to excite the general imagination in the appearance (or, for that matter, the non-appearance) of a plan for a dictionary of Old English or a detailed microphotographic study of the organogenesis of flowers. University publishers do little to change this image: books such as these, despite providing the butt for occasional humour, are their stock in trade and *raison d’être*. Indeed, in their low profile and measured persistence, the university presses smack of an earlier grey Canadianism of the pre-Trudeau era. Yet they are not without a ferment of their own, and strains of their own; and in a period of general industrial malaise they are having a continuing, if not indeed a growing, impact on Canada’s literary and national development that is belied by their small voice and scale of operation (for most are staffed by only a handful of people, and some only by professors and administrators who must fit publishing into an already crowded timetable). Although their share of dollar sales is not large, for most of their books are intended for severely limited markets, the eleven members of the Association of Canadian University Presses show up remarkably well in a more significant index — the relative number of titles that get published. Out of every nine Canadian books currently in print, in French or English, one bears the imprint of a university press. Moreover, this proportion has been growing. Among francophone publishers, the university presses have since 1970 accounted for about nine per cent of new books published each year; but in English-language publishing the university-press share has climbed since 1970 from eight per cent of the total of books in print to ten per cent in 1971 and to twelve last year.

The subject matter of a publisher's output is also important. In addition to the staple esoteric academic topics, the university presses now are publishing a remarkable number of books that probe directly into the Canadian make-up. In its current seasonal catalogue the University of Toronto Press, for example, lists new books on the psychology of charisma, the impact of freer trade on the Canadian economy, the rural Ontario scene as depicted by Thoreau MacDonald, the development of Canadian science policy, the influence of the late Douglas Duncan on Canadian art and artists, the growth of Social Credit in Quebec, plus a translation of Fernand Dumant's *La Vigile du Québec* and several new books in three important series of reprints which are making newly available key works in the study of Canadian literature and social history. This same press has published, over the years, such works as Harold Innis's *Fur Trade* and *Bias of Communication*, Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy*, John Porter's *Vertical Mosaic*, Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada*, Reginald Watters' checklists of Canadian literature, the *Literary History of Canada* edited by Carl F. Klinck, Douglas Jones' *Butterfly on Rock*, and Jack Warwick's *Long Journey*, as well as the monumental Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

Toronto's publishing list has certain advantages as an example. For most of this century Toronto (founded in 1901) was the only English-language university press in Canada (Les Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa were founded in 1936, Les Presses de l'université Laval in 1950, McGill — now McGill-Queen's — University Press in 1960). Toronto's backlist furthermore comprises about three-quarters of the English-language university press titles in print, and a little over half the total in both languages. (To put Toronto in a national context, it annually publishes more new titles than any other house in the country, and its backlist is slightly larger than those of McClelland and Stewart and Clarke, Irwin combined.) But what is true of Toronto holds for its brethren, whether it is McGill-Queen's series on environmental pollution, or the well-illustrated works on Borduas and de Tonnancour published by Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, or the massive study of Canadian administrative law now in preparation at Laval.

This activity is critical. It is not unique of course to the university press: scholarship also benefits when Donald Creighton is published by Macmillan or Margaret Atwood by the House of Anansi. But commercial houses, which must return their shareholders an eventual profit, are far more likely to make only forays into Canadiana, carrying off the cream for a coffee table book or a library series or a college text. None of them can afford to support — often at consider-

able financial loss — the sustained publication of in-depth academic investigations of Canada's literary heritage, history, economics, labour relations, political science, law, or other fields. That is the university press's function. "In the end most scholarly publishing cannot be profitable, or at least it must be selected and edited and produced with the purpose of maximizing its academic service rather than its profitability." (*Report of the Royal Commission on Book Publishing in Ontario*, p. 229: the Commissioners might have added that such a programme normally requires substantial subsidization, direct and/or indirect, from the parent university, as well as benefiting from the watchful eye of a university-appointed editorial committee of scholars.) Commercial publishers do, however (and this is probably a proper division of labour and of spoils), ensure that much of what is published by a university press reaches a broader market in revised form, either as more popular nonfiction or in a high-school or elementary-grade textbook. Toronto's backlist illustrates this further point — that the influence of a university press book may extend well beyond its covers and the campus. It may directly affect political or economic policy; it may provide the raw material for a paperback best-seller; it may add expressions to the language; it may alter the teaching of Canadian cultural and economic history. It is this seminal and pervasive influence that makes a strong university publishing community an important national resource.

The extensive publication of Canadian material by scholarly publishers results in part from deliberate editorial policy and manuscript procurement, but it has been possible only because of, and ultimately it reflects, the upsurge in Canadian studies among the teaching staffs of our universities. In this respect the university presses have not, and will not, change. Their principal aim is to extend the professional study and the lecture room, to disseminate the fruits of scholarly research so that others may build thereon. The advance of knowledge depends upon this role. Research unpublished is stillborn, but every scholarly book has the potential of stimulating further work in its field. Beyond this, as A.S.P. Woodhouse once wrote, "without the hope of publication, scholarship languishes"; on the other hand, the existence of a lively university press may stimulate authors who would not otherwise write.

The scholarship which is the lifeblood of a university press may be national or even regional in some of its emphasis, yet in its approaches, its standards, and in large measure its subject matter and intended audience, it recognizes no boundaries. Perhaps that is why Canadian scholarly publishers have been less vocal than some of their trade and educational colleagues in demanding nation-

alistic protection. A substantial proportion (over fifty per cent) of a Canadian university press's sales may be outside the country, and the books thus sold may deal with Czech literature, medieval European fiscal policy, higher mathematics, or the microorganisms that infest food. Indeed, for a Canadian scholar working in a non-Canadian field, the university press may offer the only route to publication within his own country. Commercial presses are more dependent upon the domestic market and what it will buy, but for the scholarly publisher it is often only the existence of a foreign market that makes publication of a book economically possible. (It is a rueful joke at Toronto that when the first volumes of its *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* were published in 1965, considerably fewer copies were sold in Canada than in Japan.) It also seems to be true that Canadian scholars are less prone today to treat publication in their own country as second-best only after rejection by Oxford or Cambridge or Harvard or Yale, and that more and more British and American scholars are submitting first-rate manuscripts to Canadian houses that have shown strength in their areas of study. This is probably an indication of the growing maturity of Canadian scholarly publishing; but at the same time one must recognize that the same pressures which shall be discussed later are affecting university presses everywhere, and scholars are having to look further afield these days to get published at all.

Scholarly manuscripts cross borders and oceans every day in search of a publisher or in the process of appraisal; the books that result may be sold in literally any country and may be translated into half a dozen different languages. It is no wonder that the university presses, to an extent unique in Canada, have a sense of belonging to an international publishing community. There is a long tradition of co-operation with colleagues south of the border within the Association of American University Presses. The Canadian houses are quick to recognize that they have learned much through this relation, but they have also (most notably Marsh Jeanneret, Toronto's director, who was AAUP president in 1970-71) contributed to it. It was a Canadian press, Toronto, that founded the first quarterly journal for authors and publishers devoted to this field, *Scholarly Publishing*, which has quickly reached a worldwide readership and attracted an equally polynational list of contributors. And it was no coincidence that Canada was host (with the support of both Ottawa and Unesco) to a meeting in Toronto last October which led to the formation of an International Association of Scholarly Publishers, with its secretariat in Toronto. Nor is it surprising that when the Association Internationale des Presses d'Universités de Langue Française was

formed this spring at Grenoble, another Canadian, Danielle Ros, director of Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, was elected its first president.

The emphasis on scholarship and common problems has encouraged similar co-operation across language lines within Canada. Toronto and Laval have, for example, co-published many works, most notably the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada* which must be the most concrete example of true bilingualism outside government: articles for it may be written in either French or English, are then translated, are edited in both languages, checked again at both centres, and published simultaneously in both languages in companion volumes at the same price. Last October was formed the first bilingual publishing association in Canada, the Association of Canadian University Presses/Association des Presses Universitaires Canadiennes. (Other publishers are divided among the Conseil Supérieur du Livre and, on the English language, the competing Canadian Book Publishers' Council and the Independent Publishers' Association.) The members of the new body range in size from the University of Toronto Press, which includes in its publishing operation seventeen journals and also runs a specialized printing plant and four bookstores, to the University of Windsor Press which has two books in print, supports two journals, and plans expansion on the basis of a financially successful co-publication with McGraw-Hill of Marshall McLuhan's *Interior Landscape*.

The largest of the francophone members is Laval, with 337 books in print last year, a number exceeded within Québec only by Fides and Éditions du Jour. One of the members functions bilingually: Les Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa publishes in either French or English (mostly the former), or both, depending on author and subject. Five of the members besides Windsor have been founded since the expansion of higher education began in earnest in the late 1950s: McGill-Queen's (1960), Montréal (1962), Manitoba (1967), Québec (1969), and British Columbia (1971). Two are sponsored by specialized institutions that are not universities, the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, both in Toronto. In addition, several other universities and university departments have small publishing programmes of their own.

YET ALL IS NOT WELL in the ivy-covered publishing houses. Strains and cracks are appearing, not from foreign competition but notably because of government policies — a legacy of past expansion and current austerity.

Parts of the story are well known, although their impact on university presses may still not be fully recognized. The sixties were a heady decade in all university endeavours: money was available, staffs were growing, buildings — indeed whole campuses — were mushrooming to meet the high school students clamouring for admissions; libraries enjoyed budgets such that a large commercial reprint publisher could boast, “I can sell any book I offer,” and mean it; university press sales and establishments swelled as part of the tide, and for many a university without its own imprint a press promised prestige and a channel for its faculty’s publications. That was the picture across North America, on both sides of the border. Then a general disenchantment set in. Public funds were cut. Library budgets in both the United States and Canada were slashed. Research libraries are the bread-and-butter accounts of university press sales, and their declining power to purchase affected not only new books (titles were not bought, or were bought singly instead of in multiple copies as before) but also backlist sales and journal subscriptions (the latter already hard hit by institutional photocopying). Sales volume dropped and inventory mounted as stocks of old titles remained relatively static. The parent universities, fighting across-the-board budget pressures, were unable to increase subsidies to the presses to make up for declining sales revenue, and at the same time the costs of publishing — of salaries, of typesetting, paper, printing, and binding, of promotion (particularly by mail), and of order fulfilment — rose sharply.

Non-economic pressures grew as well. With the output of a growing professoriate and the needs of expanding disciplines such as environmental science and Canadian studies, the number of manuscripts submitted to university presses increased sharply. Not all received or deserved serious consideration, but the number of those that did at Toronto roughly trebled in a little over a decade. This is a rate that paralleled remarkably the growth of teaching staff in Canadian universities over the same period. There is no reason to believe that the quest for publication will decline in the near future. It may be anticipated rather that it will continue to rise as manuscripts now in preparation reach fruition, for today’s scholars seem to be more productive than in the past, possibly because the prospects of publication had until recently been improving so greatly. One might also anticipate that, as academic jobs grow scarce, publish-or-perish will become more intense and would-be authors accordingly more aggressive. The university press is caught between two opposing forces — a growing demand for more publication, and declining ability to carry on subsidized programs even at existing

levels. A year ago university publishers were talking about the "crisis" in their profession. Today they are beginning to talk about a long-term crunch.

How can this gloomy picture be related to the rosy statistics of a few pages back? Part of the answer is, of course, that publishing commitments (and particularly scholarly publishing commitments) are not made and met within a single year; many of the titles brought out in 1972 were promised, if not in actual production, before the financial picture darkened. Also, the increasing proportion of university-press titles in English-language publishing comes in a context of cutbacks by publishers in the trade and educational areas. But the most important reason why university presses have so far successfully weathered the storm has been the prompt and generous reassurance they have received from their principal non-university patrons. When the problem was set out at an unprecedented meeting in January 1972 between the country's university publishers and the Joint Committee on Publication of the Humanities and Social Science Research Councils of Canada, both councils agreed to increase substantially their support for book publication, to make the terms of that support more flexible, and to channel it whenever possible to Canadian houses rather than abroad. Their parent body, the Canada Council, at about the same time substantially increased its support to learned journals. University presses have also been strengthened by other government support to the book publishing industry: they share in block grants under a program instituted by the Canada Council; those in Quebec receive provincial grants for books; those in Ontario may be expected to be eligible for such assistance as may be provided as a result of that province's recent Royal Commission report. Both Toronto and McGill-Queen's also received last year unexpected large grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, intended primarily to support publication of works in the humanities by younger scholars.

With such patronage, the convulsions that have racked presses south of the border have not yet been evident here. In the United States two university presses have been closed down, and a third avoided extinction only after vigorous lobbying by the teaching staff of its university (two of the most vociferous petitioners being professors whose manuscripts it had rejected!); the director of one of the most prestigious of all American university presses has been fired, in part for a superfluity of red ink; and, overall, staffs have been cut, fewer books published, and belts tightened. No presses have been closed in Canada, but budgets have been pared and personnel reduced. There is less talk on two or three Canadian

campuses of starting new presses, and at least one of the smaller existing presses seems to have deferred plans to appoint a full-time director.

There has never been much fat in university publishing, even at the best of times, and government support cannot be expected to grow indefinitely. The conflicting pressures that began with the seventies may be expected to continue through the decade. What then will this mean for authors and readers of university press books?

The scholarly author who offers a fresh, original approach to a significant subject should never have great difficulty in reaching print. In general, however, we might expect that it will become more difficult to be published. The costs of appraising a manuscript are sizable — not only in the time and salaries of editors, but equally in the hours and energy required of outside scholarly readers who must divert efforts from their own writing and research to advise on the publishability of others'. More and more manuscripts of apparently marginal importance thus may have to be summarily dismissed. The doctoral thesis, with few exceptions, will more frequently be rejected without detailed reading, for so few theses are truly books, and the work required to revise most of them into books is so great, that publishers can little afford these days to scour the doctoral desert for seeds and nurture the few they encounter that hold the promise of germination. More and more, also, it may be expected that manuscripts from outside Canada will be given a low priority unless they fit precisely into a press's area of publishing concentration — for example, into an established series. This is a development which gives no cause for satisfaction, but only embarrassment, in view of the liberal support Canadian scholarship has received in the past from U.S. foundations, the importance of the U.S. market for Canadian scholarly books, and the desirability of international recognition for Canadian imprints. But the first priority must be to Canadian scholars. As well, we may expect presses to concentrate their efforts in areas of demonstrated strength where they already have reputations and substantial backlists, and to be more reluctant to publish in fields new to them, no matter how deserving.

As subsidizing funds grow relatively more scarce, standards of acceptance may reluctantly have to be adapted. When subsidization is unavailable, the book that is published may not necessarily be the most significant but the one most likely to find a market to cover costs of publication. University presses will also find it increasingly tempting, if not essential, to publish some books that do more than recover their own costs — that may, in fact, make a substantial contribution to overhead and even generate net revenue that can be turned into subsidizing

funds for other works. A certain number of university press titles have always reached the general bookstore. Such books are for the most part edited and produced to the same standards that govern all university publishing, but to the extent that a press must concentrate its efforts on their development it may vitiate its principal efforts. (This is not to gainsay the fact that a work of impeccably serious research, such as *The Vertical Mosaic*, may start life as a subsidized short-run title and end up selling 72,000 copies.)

We may also anticipate that those scholarly books which do receive serious consideration, and which eventually are judged suitable for publication, will find their passage further slowed by economics. They will have to take their place in line, not only until the funds that may be necessary to subsidize them can be found, but also until the editors, whose numbers are likewise restricted by lack of money, can handle them through copy-editing and proof.

University presses are introducing new techniques into their book production to help reduce some costs. Some are using computer typesetting where applicable, most usefully to date in the publication of complex bibliographies. Some are using computer-assisted phototypesetters, and other forms of "cold type" where possible, instead of the traditional but more expensive hot-metal setting. They are moving away from the codex, into microfilm publication and occasional excursions into multimedia. Along with such innovation, they are providing a continuing example of typographic excellence, as they have for years through the work of Robert Reid at McGill and more recently of Allan Fleming at Toronto. (The only Canadian book ever to win a gold medal at the famous Leipzig competition for the year's "most beautiful book in the world" was published by a university press in 1969.)

In spite of these efforts, books which meet high standards of production will cost considerably more in the future, although comparison of their prices with those of a bottle of good Scotch or burgundy suggests that the book-buyer has little to complain of. In the production of other books, the upward price spiral will be moderated by compromise. More economical paper and binding will be used. Designs will be standardized. More books will be produced by "strike-on" — a euphemism which means typewritten, whether by a sophisticated tape-driven machine whose product cannot be easily distinguished from hot-metal typesetting, or by standard office machines operated by the author or his secretary to the publisher's specifications. More often, tabular material, computer printouts, or appendices may be published in future on microfiches tucked into a package at the back of the book to complement the printed text; there will be

initial inconvenience, but the economics of micropublication will enable authors to present documentation to an extent never before practicable.

The kind of creative compromise that may become more common is exemplified by a process developed in the Printing Department of the University of Toronto Press. With a relatively simple adaptation of present equipment, it is possible to produce reprints of books in quantities of as few as fifty copies, and to sell them at prices acceptable to libraries (six to seven cents a page) if not particularly to individuals. This process has been applied to a number of out-of-print Toronto titles and to selected works of nineteenth-century Canadian literature, none of which could support a normal reprinting. The volumes that result from this development are somewhat less than pleasing aesthetically, but they are fully readable; and with them the term "o/p" may in time be erased from publishing and a corpus of otherwise unavailable early Canadian literature be deposited in university and other reference libraries.

There has been no suggestion that editorial standards should be permitted to suffer a parallel compromise. A scholarly publisher stands or falls on the quality of his editorial judgment and performance. Yet pressures may be expected to be reflected here as well, despite the best intentions, for no increase in staff has been possible that is comparable to the growth in demands upon the presses. Less time may be available to help authors to develop their manuscripts, and in other ways editors may in future appear less accommodating. Presses are less able today to absorb the cost of an author who cannot make up his mind, who depends unduly on the editor to catch errors in spelling or citation, who debates overlong about the use of illustration, who holds up proofs or asks unreasonable changes in them. Increasing sophistication of printing technology is coupled with increasing cost of delay and alteration.

There is a small paradox here, however, for as long as neither author nor publisher wants any revision — in fact no *editing* — new technology does make it possible to disseminate material that could not support a traditional style of publication. The old joke about a journal of unpublished manuscripts is coming true: at least one firm in the United States is prepared to publish works in microform, by photographing typescript provided directly by the author and selling the result to scholars and libraries. There is a parallel industry devoted to issuing documents and out-of-print works in microform in near-epidemic proportions. University presses will have to be wary of entering uncritical parapublishing.

One further development may be expected, although it may be approached with some reluctance. This is greater co-operation between presses on a more

formal and intimate level than in the past. A trend is evident in the United States toward consolidation and the creation of regional presses, such as the University Press of Kentucky which serves nine campuses in its state. In 1969 McGill and Queen's Universities crossed provincial boundaries to pool their resources on a parity basis in a single university press with administrative offices in Montreal and editorial offices on both campuses. (This experiment was described in detail by the director of that press, Robin H. Strachan, in *Scholarly Publishing*, January 1971.) There has been some talk of a press to serve a number of universities in the Atlantic provinces, and it does not seem unreasonable (to an easterner at any rate) that some of the existing Western presses and publication centres might yet join forces in some manner. The form of co-operation can vary considerably, and can ensure that individual universities retain autonomy in the one and only critical area, the decision to publish. This is the nature of a proposal for a new Universities of Ontario Press, which would provide a central shared facility for warehousing, order fulfilment, and (if desired) editorial and production services for presses that are now in operation or may be started at any or all of the fourteen Ontario universities, while leaving the individual presses to decide which books they will sponsor, all of which will bear the individual press's own imprint. There are powerful reasons for such a move. Economies of scale operate in scholarly publishing as in any other business. It has been suggested that maximum efficiency is reached at net billed sales of just over a million dollars, which is not a realistic goal for most Canadian presses.

Some years ago the director of Harvard University Press gave a classic description of the aim of the scholarly publisher and the constraints within which he must operate: "A university press exists to publish as many good scholarly books as possible short of bankruptcy." The edge of financial bankruptcy seems closer today than it has sometimes in the past, but it can be controlled by tight accounting, conservative decisions, and cutbacks as necessary in publication programs. There is an intellectual insolvency, however, that will grow if such financial measures should create a serious gap between what the university presses should be publishing to meet the needs of their community, and what it is possible for them to publish. Canadian scholarly publishers, with support from universities and government, are endeavouring to ensure that every worthwhile manuscript they receive does become a book. Their continuing success is a goal to which the country's scholars and academic administrators, as well as its university publishers, must address themselves.