

NEW WAVE IN PUBLISHING

ORIGINS

What do you consider the principal reason (or reasons) for the rise of so many new publishing houses in Canada during the past five years?

WRITERS couldn't get published. Houses like Anansi have filled a need, first by proving that there are Canadian writers (by putting their books into print); this was newsworthy enough that a market for them began to develop; the emphasis on the Canadian Identity bolstered the public's awareness (to say nothing of Royal Commission, attention from the Federal Gov. etc.) It's been a snowballing effect — but I think the idea behind most new houses was simply to fill the need for publishing houses who would publish new Canadian writers. I think they all assumed there was a readership out there.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

A NEW SENSE of the differences involved in being Canadian. The centennial was the occasion.

MICHAEL MACKLEM

REGIONALISM, nationalism, cheaper zazzier printing methods . . . but perhaps the most consistent element was one or more

talented younger writers who had either been turned down at the established houses, or felt totally alienated from their apparent aims and sensibility, or both. So they started new ones. It was their impatience, energy and naïveté that brought all but a handful of the new houses into existence.

Because most of those writer/founders were literary types, their houses publish a far higher proportion of literature than do the mainline houses.

Another note in literary sociology: older conventions of publishing your own work with another press have gone by the boards. Instead, the little-magazine groundrules apply.

DENNIS LEE

THE DISCOVERY, among ourselves, that *we* have the writers — poets, playwrights, novelists, short story writers, even artists and film makers, *and* that they need books — as a service to *their* community and to the community at large.

DAVID ROBINSON

Questions by

GEORGE WOODCOCK

Answers by

SHIRLEY GIBSON (Anansi)

MICHAEL MACKLEM (Oberon)

DENNIS LEE (formerly Anansi)

DAVID ROBINSON (Talonbooks)

JAMES LORIMER (James, Lewis & Samuel)

VICTOR COLEMAN (Coach House)

MEL HURTIG (M. G. Hurtig)

THOUGH I AM SURE people close to publishing will think it a bit silly to say so, I think that the first point to be made about why publishing houses have been established in the last few years is that it has not been done as a way of making money. I am constantly amazed by the assumption which is common, among a few writers, many academics, and most of the cultural policy-makers in the country, that book publishing is really pizza manufacturing or oil refining in disguise — somebody's bright idea about how they can make a lot of money and build a colonial empire. Perhaps this is yet another expression of cultural colonialism, an automatic refusal to give cultural value and importance to an activity when it happens in Canada, even though it is taken for granted when it happens elsewhere. How often is Allen Lane described by his many Canadian admirers as somebody who wanted to get rich quick and did it in book publishing?

My impression is that the main reason why people have turned to starting publishing operations recently has been an awareness, implicit if not explicit, of the

way that the medium of publishing has been impoverished, warped, and restricted to make it a very serious bottleneck between writers and readers. Not only was the total number of original books by Canadian writers being published very small, but the kinds of readers being catered to was also very restricted. That of course is still true, except in the restricted areas which the new houses have added. People interested in Liberal and Tory political history, for instance, were well served by the established publishers; but it is only since the new houses got going that there has been much available from Canadian publishers for people interested in history seen from a more radical viewpoint.

I think that all the media, both the cultural media and the mass media, are impoverished and restricted in the way that publishing was and mostly still is. The main reason why something happened in publishing before, say, anything of note happened in the mass magazine or pop music recording is that publishing is an easier medium than most for people to get into. It takes relatively little spec-

ialized knowledge and relatively little capital, at least for a small operation. If it took, say, \$500,000 to start a book publishing operation as it would to start a decent mass magazine or to finance a modest feature film, there would be no new book publishers.

JAMES LORIMER

THE REASONS for the rise are still pretty vague; I mean, *it wasn't* WWII, so we're not actually examining them that rigidly; I see them as being mainly economic. Inflation came to us as a kind of rakeoff from a Boom; and the Government Arts Agencies were responsive and sympathetic. The five year marker suggests you're using the Anansi calendar. Coach House started in 1965, Contact Press published its last book (much to the chagrin of two-thirds of its editorial board) in 1966. The book was *New Wave Canada*.

VICTOR COLEMAN

CANADA is maturing as a nation, and the evolution of the new publishing houses was only inevitable. Too many Canadians keep thinking of us as a country of ten million people or fifteen million, but of course we're going on twenty-three million and we're developing better writers and better readers and a public much more interested in their own country than they used to be. The day is long past when most Canadians would look across the ocean or across the border for what was necessarily best or necessarily right in the world. More and more Canadians are recognizing how lucky we have been to live in a country that is still very much in the process of just becoming, and so all of this is chicken-and-egg and all of it made the new publishing houses inevitable. Some of the older Canadian firms were very, very conservative and far too many good books and good writers were going unpublished.

MEL HURTIG

CONSTITUENCY

How far have writers in fact been responsible for creating these new presses? What support have they since given them?

THERE'S no question that they founded a number of them — Godfrey, Lee, Lorimer, Coleman, Bacque, MacSkimming — others are currently involved (Atwood, Graeme Gibson, Newlove, Helwig, Matt Cohen, etc — mostly in editorial capacities, but also in management). I think too that the new presses have created some writers from within; my first book of poetry has just been released.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

IN MANY CASES they have been directly involved and even where they have not they have given decisive support. This is where the situation in Canada differs from that in the States. Here the new houses are at the *centre* of the movement, not on the fringe.

MICHAEL MACKLEM

MOST of the new houses I know were started by a writer or writers. Hurtig

wasn't, nor Peter Martin Associates, nor Oberon (though Michael Macklem has written and translated); otherwise, they were.

In my experience, writers supported Anansi very honourably: they pressed for things that mattered to them, and were almost always able to see the decisions that affected their book in the context of the whole press. When they were well reviewed, many were wooed by the established houses that had originally turned them down. By far the most common thing was for them to stay with a house that had first shown confidence in them.

DENNIS LEE

WRITERS, I think, have been completely responsible for the creation of the new presses, but their rise does not rest with them alone. Writers could just as soon sink any one of the new presses as aid them. Solidarity, dedication, and careful management have, I think, built the new presses. As for writer-contributor/subscribers, there seem to be a hardcore number of writers who are supporting the movement as it is afoot, aligning themselves by working for *or* with the various presses, but there are those too who play publishers off against one another, establishing literary and other more commercial reputations; then again, there are those who sadly enough have previously aligned themselves, *before* the rush, and

who are a bit lost, still somehow colonial-ly tied; or, too, there are those who are only out for their own aggrandizement and would use any publisher to gain a reputation.

DAVID ROBINSON

CERTAINLY writers have been involved in a lot of the new houses, though it is important to remember the exceptions like Hurtig and Peter Martin Associates. Where they have been involved, like Dennis Lee and now Margaret Atwood in Anansi or the three original New Press partners, they have stayed at least for some time while things got going, or went so badly wrong that they felt it was time to get out.

JAMES LORIMER

WHAT the editors at Contact believed was that *only* the writers read the books. I argued many times long and hard with Ray Souster about their silly limited edition policy and general lack of purpose as soon as the precious object-book appeared. They seldom followed through. But they were writers. I think all the writers who were hassled about publication were screaming, and their screams were heard; but so far only partially answered or satisfied.

The writers support us by writing for something other than profit and promises.

VICTOR COLEMAN

VIABILITY

Have the new publishing houses established themselves (a) in terms of financial viability and (b) in terms of literary viability?

SOME HAVE . . . some haven't, and I think we'll see, within the next couple of years, a consolidation of some houses, a falling

by the wayside for others, as part of a natural process. Financial viability depends on many things (including help

from governments at the moment) but it also relates heavily to your publishing policy. If it's relevant, and fills a need (and thank God these needs are being acknowledged in Canada, finally) financial viability is possible — not easy, until we get some control over our distribution problems, but possible. Literary viability — or editorial viability — is, I think, much the same. If you can carve out an editorial space for yourself (or usurp somebody else's by doing it better?) then the chances are fairly good — e.g. James Lewis & Samuel with their books directed to the post-secondary school market. Anansi seems to have done it by means of a relentless (but hopefully somewhat imaginative) editorial policy, with emphasis on certain kinds of books which we do best. Often we're tempted to slop (and that's a good word for it) over into areas which we know little about. Fortunately a kind of ingrained sloth and intuition usually brings us back into line — while permitting us to diversify and expand our boundaries little by little.

I think the houses least likely to succeed are those which go publishing off in all directions — that destroy their literary viability which of course means the end of financial viability too.

Must qualify this; it refers of course only to smaller houses. Big ones have enough time, money, staff, etc. to produce the kind of promotion that sells almost any kind of book... no editorial viability = financial viability. But Canada doesn't own too many of them.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

(a) No — most of the new houses are concerned centrally with books that

aren't commercially viable without public subsidy.

(b) Certainly — these houses are where the action is.

MICHAEL MACKLEM

I DON'T KNOW the answer to this question.

I'm not up to date with most of the new houses, since I left Anansi. I wouldn't be surprised to see a number of the new houses either close down or go much more commercial, over the next five years. Part of the pressure towards that is money (and there has been so much ink about that that I won't add to it). Part of it is what seems to be a natural life cycle in new enterprises (publishing or other): you seem able to do things in the first 3-5 years, on the strength of energy, ignorance and imagination, that you have trouble doing later even with far more dollars flowing through the office. And a third reason would be the tendency of writer/founders to withdraw to their own work. (To some extent, I'm a case in point.)

The literary question is interesting. Quantitatively, there is more literary mediocrity published in Canada now than before (say) 1967. That's because there is more literature being published. Proportionately, my impression is that things are about the same.

By comparison with other countries, you know, there is far less crap published in Canada than in most other western nations. In both relative and absolute terms. The main reason is that we don't have access to our own paperback racks (or didn't; a few changes have begun), so hack writers have very little outlet here. We probably have a higher propor-

tion of arty, pretentious crap than elsewhere (there is almost no such thing as a Canadian "popular novelist"); certainly we have a far lower proportion of purely cynical crap. Needless to say, it's a function of economic control, not virtue.

A lot of people who felt comfortable with the scale of Canadian writing/publishing over the last decades — in which, for example, it was possible to read every new poetry book or chapbook that appeared, as a leisure-time pursuit — feel jostled, even angered by the proliferation. I can't get very excited about it either way, myself. Good work is good work, bad work isn't, and quality doesn't change that. I do hope, as a reader, that the convention of doing new-writer anthologies will continue; otherwise interesting younger writers will certainly take longer to surface.

Incidentally, the new houses are vastly more open to non-commercial and/or freaky kinds of writing than most of the established ones have been. Which is a good thing. But once that is acknowledged, I can't see that the average level of editorial judgment and skill in the new houses, with their particular tastes, is notably higher than at the old houses, with theirs; i.e., no hell.

DENNIS LEE

I DON'T THINK any Canadian press as it now stands can claim financial viability. At this point, given the concerns, I just don't think it's possible. Literary viability, however, is a different story and most new Canadian presses can claim this in some form or another simply because of the authors they represent. I don't think until Canadian publishers are able to move into educational publishing instead of its being ripped-off by the American

branch plants will they stand a chance of becoming financially viable. For now, most Canadian publishers are too busy building basic lists to be exploring the educational market. Perhaps too, some will never feed this market. That wouldn't be so bad either. I think the big rush to be educated is perhaps over. I, for one, sometimes wish I had learned more of a trade, but only if it were taught with some imagination. Publishers, if they're deprived of educational markets, will have to re-examine what they're publishing, perhaps publish the tarot and the zodiac — what the masses are interested in — or back to nature, whole earth, rather than what the system has been feeding them. It should be interesting.

DAVID ROBINSON

FINANCIALLY, only the most commercial houses are in anything close to reasonable shape. The fact that most of the new houses are still around, and many are expanding their activities quite rapidly, is solely a result of recent governmental financial assistance measures, including the prospect (if not the receipt) of working capital loans from the Ontario government for Ontario houses and the various federal programmes financed (but miserably) by the Secretary of State. But with the demand for Canadian books increasing, and with many of us looking very carefully and closely at the commercial ends of our operation in order to improve our financial state, I think it is possible that some of the new houses will prove financially viable.

In terms of literary viability, I think there is no question. I also think it is very interesting that there are some people in the book world who are complaining that

"too many" Canadian books are being published these days, so many I suspect that the bookstores are having trouble finding room for all the American and British books they have stocked for so long, and the reviewers are finding to their dismay that they have to spend so much time reading the Canadian books that come out that they don't have enough time for the books they think are really worth reading. Anywhere else in the non-colonized world, people would boast if the number of books being written and published were increasing, particularly people in the book trade. One of the complainers is, of course, the man whose bookstore has the best general stock of Canadian books in Vancouver.

JAMES LORIMER

(a) THE ones who have gone astray of original ideals;

(b) The ones who've stuck to their original ideals are bound to have continuous trouble economically because their prod-

uct doesn't make a 'profit' in terms of ready cash.

As far as literary viability goes, a book like *Survival* makes the literature stop. I think I'm more interested in letting it continue, even if it doesn't get recognized by the media as a revolutionary exercise.

VICTOR COLEMAN

THE answer is (a) *to a degree* and (b) *emphatically*. Most of the new publishing houses, to my knowledge, are having a tough time financially. Working capital is their major problem. In some cases the administrative or financial management is weak. But in terms of their product . . . the books that they publish . . . I think the new houses have made a very substantial contribution from almost every conceivable point of view and certainly including "literary viability". Almost without exception, the foremost new houses have done some very imaginative publishing and some very successful publishing in terms of sales.

MEL HURTIG

NATIONALISM

Some of the new presses have taken on a distinctively "Canadian" tone. How far did nationalist motives lead to their creation?

IF YOU FORM a company or work with a company which was founded primarily to get Canadian writers into the hands of Canadian readers, I guess that makes you at least nationalistic. Once into it, the feeling tends to grow. I have on the wall in front of me a quote by the president of McGraw Hill International; "The prime objective of a foreign subsidiary is not its own publishing but the sale of the U.S. product." The president

of another branch-plant told me to my face that Canada could never have a literature of its own — yes, other countries (any other countries) could, but not Canada. I know innumerable writers whose books were turned down by subsidiaries because "our funds for experimental writers must be used on the writers in our own country." If you get much of that, and you do, there's not much alternative.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

NATIONALIST motives were of cardinal importance from the start in most cases. This has latterly become important also at Oberon. This is partly a matter of marketability, partly a matter of conviction.

MICHAEL MACKLEM

DAVE GODFREY and I started Anansi in 1967, and I think these things were more sharply defined for Dave at that time than for me.

At the beginning, my publishing nationalism was largely a positive thing: I wanted to read more good stuff by people rooted where I was. As time went on, it started to include a lot more negative things to boot. I began to see just how badly Canadian writers and readers are fucked by most publishers who operate in the country, and the notion that appeals to their ideals would change anything came to seem pretty laughable.

I had known nothing about the policies of book clubs; nor about paperback distribution; nor about the kind of books educational houses are selling to schools. I shared the impression that the visible bad-guys — the Longmans or Doubledays, which only did a small handful of Canadian trade books a year — were the villains of the piece. It only gradually dawned on me that there are scores of corporations flogging books in the country — some Canadian-owned, though more foreign-owned — that don't even bother to maintain editorial offices here; that treat us unequivocally as a marketing colony. I began to hear the rumours about paperback distributors and organized crime. And after awhile the polite tokenist publishers, while they didn't look any less shabby than before, were clearly not the worst offenders by any means. That

made my nationalism a lot more aggressive.

DENNIS LEE

TALONBOOKS' impetus to begin publishing was local, which is where I think it should be. Canada is such a fucking huge country, you can't possibly really know who's writing in the Maritimes or, if they speak the same language, if they have made it into the 20th century, yet there are certain figures, certain writers, who stand above others and that's, I guess, where the nationalism comes in. Too, the whole nationalist issue confounds me. Some of our more ardent nationalists (Dave Godfrey, for example) will buy over-runs of sheets from American publishers, thus feeding the American corporations, President Nixon's friends, who own all but three of the New York publishers; and there are others who have reputable firms (Clarke Irwin, General Publishing), and who make a large portion of their money on importing lines and who only publish Canadian books on the side, for prestige (?) and to lay claim to the word "nationalist". To me, it's simple. You print Canadian books by Canadian authors on Canadian paper (if that's the paper you want to use), in Canada, and you put a beaver or some symbol like Coach House does on the book to prove it. Of course, you can publish American or British authors if you like — if they're good and you get the chance, but you publish them here, give them a home. Repatriate what's been lost and add to what you've already got. Don't fall victim in any way.

DAVID ROBINSON

IT SEEMS TO me that the book publishing medium is organized so that publishing

is either a local or a national activity. There are no real international publishers, who regularly publish and distribute books for international audiences. Even the U.S. multi-nationals, before they can regularly do international trade publishing, are going to have to do much more to create an international market. Now, markets and readers and writers (with a few notable exceptions) seem to me to work on a national basis. So I think anyone getting involved in publishing automatically directs his attention to the local or the national market in which he is operating, and gears his activities primarily to that.

But if you were to look at the publishing programmes of large firms in countries like Britain and France, certainly you would see many books which could be expected to be of interest only to British or French readers, and many others which would be of interest primarily to British or French readers, but also to others if they were published in other countries. Operating in a branch-plant economy, with tremendous penetration from the U.S. and to a lesser extent Britain, it is hardly surprising that Canadian publishers find themselves concentrating on producing the kind of books that U.S. and U.K. publishers are not publishing, which is to say books only of interest to Canadian readers because of the character of their subject-matter. The few established firms for which this is not completely the case, it seems to me, are locked into a peculiar continentalist approach which doesn't really work because they are so far out on the fringes of the empire.

But of course it is true, of me and of a

number of the others involved in the new houses, that part of the reason for becoming involved in this activity was an explicit concern with freeing up and expanding one of the media essential for an independent Canadian cultural and intellectual life.

JAMES LORIMER

ONE OF OUR BIGGEST sellers this year will be Allen Ginsberg's *Iron Horse*. Ginsberg was here, stopped for a while, gave us the ms., and we produced what sympathetic folk are calling a beautiful book.

National Culture is as important as its content wants to be. More self-promotion otherwise.

The difficulty of the "regional" ethic is more to the point I think.

Most of my influence came from south of the border or from the region I grew up in. It was men and women, not books. I never asked anybody his Nationality and don't intend to start.

VICTOR COLEMAN

HERE IS ONE of the most important questions and one of the most difficult for me to answer. In our case, our evolution from booksellers to publishers occurred at the same time as our increasing concern for the survival of our country. But I'm certain that there weren't "motives" involved, but rather that it "happened" at the same time. I would hardly think that it was an accident that our first major success was *The New Romans*. But somehow it seems to me that the word "nationalist" has a slightly negative connotation in your questionnaire. I may be wrong.

MEL HURTIG

WHEN A MAN IS TIRED OF TORONTO . . .

Why do you think there has been so little effective decentralization in this new wave of publishing? Why is most publishing still done in Ontario?

THERE IS NO GETTING around the geographical fact that the centre of English language publishing is in Ontario. Many of us would like to move out to the mountains and the sea but here we are. Unquestionably this gives us a basic strength, but we also work our asses off — allowing that it's easier to do that in Ontario than in the Maritimes. But you have to begin somewhere.

For instance, we've been very successful in the past couple of years with the Ontario Council of the Arts. They started out by giving us charitable little grants, and we've poked and prodded them into what is really quite decent action. A Vancouver writer/publisher, who shall remain nameless, talked to me in my office and wanted to know if I would get him money from the Ontario government — if not, why not — he was prepared to take up temporary residence here to get it. I suggested that, inasmuch as B.C. is not exactly starving, he might go back home, form a tough lobbying group with the west coast publishers, and put the screws on the B.C. government. To date, I have not heard a progress report.

Of course we have advantages here in Ontario, but many of them we've created, or at least helped to create, ourselves. I'm not so insensitive that I can't imagine the bile that rises in many throats — both East and West — when they think of us, but certainly the IPA, in spite of accusations to the contrary, is making great

efforts to help the regional publishers. But the initiative has to come from the people primarily concerned. Another publisher (East) asked me how I could find time for all the meetings, trips, letters, phone-calls which lobbying entails. A good question. Nobody can afford it, so you spread it around — allowing that there will always be workers and non-workers in any group.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

VANCOUVER is well represented. The new houses tend to develop where the writers are. Oberon is an exception. How many good writers do you think there are in Saskatoon?

MICHAEL MACKLEM

THE GEOGRAPHICAL distribution of the new presses is much more proportionate to the distribution of people in the country than the old presses. Aren't the established houses purely Toronto?

Toronto presses are bound to reflect Toronto and all it implies, even if they try not to be callowly or shallowly Toronto. But I can't get too worked up about that. I was extended to the limit for six years, helping make a press happen in Toronto. We did a lot of southern Ontario writers, a fair number of others. If I'd been working at a new house in Vancouver or Charlottetown, I can't imagine that it could have been any more draining; and the relative proportions of

where our authors came from would have been reversed. Isn't that normal?

God knows, most of the Toronto people knew bugger-all about publishing before they got into it. They were working on the assumption that publishing was important, and if nobody else would do certain things, then they would themselves. People who have put their own asses on the line in other places understand what's going on in the process, I think, and know that you work within the limitations of who you are. Which includes where you are. Anybody in Flin Flon who doesn't like a whole lot of new publishers in Toronto should start a new house in Flin Flon.

DENNIS LEE

GOOD QUESTION. It's because 63% of the money the federal government is putting into publishing in English Canada is going to Ontario and 56.5% is going to Toronto. It's the old Eastern Axis syndrome, where the budgets and the decision-making power is kept in the East. It works that way for the CBC, for NFB, and now too, for publishing. Power centralizes, Godfrey tells me, and it stagnates. I don't know how to change it, except to offer to do things over and over again, to bring new blood in, but also, to move things out. I try, in letters I don't think anybody reads or cares about, and I go back, if even to confront them with my presence, as often as I can. It's difficult, and they never come to you. People are afraid; paranoid, suspicious. More trust is what's needed; more working together rather than in isolated pockets.

DAVID ROBINSON

AT THE LEVEL of the small poetry presses, there is of course tremendous decentralization in what has been happening, with new presses starting up right across the country. One of the difficulties about their situation is, of course, that in the absence of supporting media which are intensive enough to provide detailed coverage of what the small houses are doing, they are not widely known outside their localities, and they do not have a distribution network which operates effectively across the country.

At the level of the larger new houses, the new presses are about as centralized as the established Canadian publishers. This must be partly because, though it is extremely difficult to establish a successful new firm anywhere in Canada, it is likely to be easier in Toronto than elsewhere, because the local market is larger than anywhere else except for the Quebec publishers in Montreal.

JAMES LORIMER

I THINK the reasons here rest largely on technology; since most publishing technology is located here the natural place for the publishing to happen is here; by the same token it's always best to have all the garbage in the dump and not spread out through the neighbourhood.

VICTOR COLEMAN

I'M NOT CERTAIN I agree. Sure, most publishing is still done in Ontario, but the trend had been a good one in the sense that many of the new houses that have become active over recent years have not been located in Toronto.

MEL HURTIG

SUCCESS OR SURVIVAL?

Have the new presses been a success as you define success? How have they helped writers . . . and readers?

SOME HAVE been more successful than others certainly, but we have created an awareness of Canadian literature (both past and present); we have brought a lot of Canadian writers to a lot of Canadian readers; and, as a spin-off, we've gotten many of the branch-plants off their tails and into the publication of Canadian writers. I don't question their motivation—they're doing it. There's lots more room for lots more success—but to date I think the new presses have done a better job than most of them would ever have thought possible a few years ago.

Many writers would never have been published without the new houses. They are finally beginning to acquire an identity and a role within their own country—no longer any need to go pounding off to Europe or Mexico. Funding agencies are recognizing them and increasing grants. Course adoptions are bringing their work to young readers. And, in line with the Great Canadian Irony, foreign houses are now wooing them. I think the new presses and the Canadian writers are defining the Canadian identity—whatever it is. And readers are learning that they/we have one—just like everybody else.

SHIRLEY GIBSON

THEY HAVE CREATED possibilities nobody dreamed of seven or eight years ago. They have added completely new dimensions to the Canadian literary scene. Many of the writers would never otherwise have been heard of. As for helping

readers, if you think reading Canadian books is good for you, then yes.

MICHAEL MACKLEM

ANANSI'S aim was to publish good writers. I think we succeeded.

DENNIS LEE

AS I THINK I've tried to explain, the new presses are a mixed lot. Success in this day and age is very suspect and, of course, hard to come by. That the presses exist is a feat in itself; that they have grown, is still more of a feat. I think everybody is struggling to give them a recognizable name and an imprint. Beyond that, when you get into motive and structure, I don't know. It's still early. Things as yet, I don't think, have sorted themselves out. For me, however, Coach House is the model.

The small houses have most definitely helped writers. Think of all the reputations that have been established. And think of the books themselves. Canada produces mighty attractive-looking books, you know. What the new presses have given readers is a new pride and a new consciousness. George Ryga talks about waiting for the first Canadian and Pierre Vallières writes that "relations between men must be radically transformed and imperialism definitely overthrown. . . ." Too, Vallières says, "We must wrest the vast resources and gigantic possibilities of this century from the grasp of businessmen." God, I know it seems small, but I believe both these men and I think it just might happen here, soon. I know

of no other country that is so close; *feel* it so. Too, I am working for it, every day. My life on the line.

DAVID ROBINSON

HERE IS WHAT I think they have done: They have increased the space available for writers in Canada, both in kinds of writing where there was already some publishing going on and in areas where there was virtually no publishing going on before they got going. This is to the benefit of writers and readers both. They are one more example of how it is possible to start independent Canadian media in some fields, free both of foreign links and of control by Canadian corporate business. They have made the issue of book publishing a political issue, by becoming involved in the fight over Ryerson and using that as a means of organizing the Canadian-owned publishers into a political pressure group which remains concerned with publishing. So they help encourage people in other fields to do the same thing, to raise cultural issues to the level of political discussion.

But I also think that what they have done is pathetically little in comparison to how much there is to do, if writing and publishing in Canada are to achieve the level necessary for independent cultural life. And book publishing is only one of many cultural and mass media where similar enormous effort will be required if we are going to work our way out of our current branch plant status.

JAMES LORIMER

TREMENDOUSLY SUCCESSFUL, with all its appurtenant broken lives. The relative

cultural ebb in Canada is over and a little of what gets published is even being read seriously. It's a whole new ballgame, culturally, and I for one think it's too soon to define it. Quantity-wise we're on the way to bigger pools of information, almost none of it, happily, on the mass-cult level — yet.

The more presses with responsible editors, the happier the writers; though writers who have no sense at all of what publishing entails are still hurt by the idea of such a small audience and no possible financial gain. The risk of publication is great and the writer has a chance therein to trim his vision or let it grow wild; he can see, or sense, a response and go on.

As for the reader, in many cases no. I think all the promotional activity that some of the presses concerned have created has fogged up the glass through which most readers find themselves discovering their own culture.

At Coach House we're helping the reader by giving him an object containing writing which reflects the writing and is therefore worthy of respect on both these levels.

VICTOR COLEMAN

OH, SURE, they have been a success. I think they have been a great success. And I think they've helped all kinds of writers and if the number of copies of all of the books sold is your criterion for "have they helped readers?" then obviously there's no doubt about the answer.

MEL HURTIG

AFTERTHOUGHTS

I prelude this last section with a statement rather than a question, since I feel some explanation of the way this collection of opinions was gathered and finally selected is necessary. Whenever even an informed outsider (as a professional writer obviously is in relation to publishing) puts questions about a field in which he is not directly involved, some of his questions will inevitably seem to the answerers less relevant to their problems than others, or, to say the least, will prove unproductive. I originally asked thirteen questions; it was obvious from the answers that three proved too insubstantial or too tangential. In dealing with them I decided that it would be most fair to the answerers, and in the end most enlightening to the reader to leave — in the case of material I did use — all the answers to any question. This meant that when a question seemed to have failed, I dropped it with all its answers. Thus three groups were immediately jettisoned. Since most answerers expressed their views at length, space became another problem; two more questions with all their answers were dropped mainly for this reason, though they were also the weakest survivors. The last three of the remaining eight were then condensed into a single question, since they were closely related, and this left the six groups of opinions on what seem to me the important facets of the new publishing that reached the printing post, and now appear. I also invited participants to express any further views they had, and of the few opinions submitted I have chosen the following by James Lorimer and Mel Hurtig because I think each adds notably to our understanding of what has been going on in publishing during the past few years.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

IT USED to be possible for creative people in Canada to get away from the fact that they were Canadians, to avoid the fact or to extinguish it by becoming British or American. There are many people around who have succeeded at one time or another in doing this, and their ranks have recently been reinforced by the arrival in the country of many who are not in fact Canadians and who have no intention of becoming so. But my impression is that it is now difficult for most people involved in artistic and intellectual work to avoid their Canadianness, and that their consciousness of that fact

leads to the difficult question of what to do about it.

Artists and intellectuals in a country like this one where many of the serious media of communication and most of the mass media are dominated by material originating from abroad or imitating foreign material have to act differently from similar people in other situations where the media already exist. An essential part of being a Canadian artist, at the present moment, is working to create the media by which the work of Canadian artists can reach a Canadian audience, and can be publicly discussed and

evaluated. Of course some of these media do already exist, but they are so thin and weak that they make possible only a very thin and weak cultural life.

For writers, that means concern about publishing. It also means concern about periodicals, since periodicals are so important for the discussion and evaluation of writers' work. For painters, it means concern about the private and public art galleries, art magazines and so on. For film-makers, it means concern about distribution companies, ownership and control of movie theatres, and the media both popular and serious as sources of movie criticism.

Of course all of us have a stake in the existence of all kinds of cultural and intellectual activity in Canada, and we should all be concerned about these matters and work at changing the present situation. But artists and intellectuals have the biggest, most immediate and direct stake. They must have these media if they are going to be able to practise their art. When these media do not exist, they are permanently crippled. We can't afford to wait, as writers, for publishers to come along and do something about publishing. This is especially true when most publishers have abdicated most or all of their cultural responsibility and function in Canada in favour of making easy money as junior "agency" partners of foreign publishers. That is why journalists can't wait for magazine publishers to start new Canadian magazines; they must start their own, create their own medium. Artists can't wait for public art gallery trustees to improve the state of the art galleries; they have to get themselves organized and try to take over

those art galleries, or at least get themselves into a position of being a force which has to be reckoned with.

It is in the light of these facts about our situation, and of the need for this kind of strategy from Canadian artists and intellectuals, that what has happened in Canadian publishing in the last few years has to be evaluated.

JAMES LORIMER

THE MOST INTERESTING thing about book publishing and the "intellectual community" that I've come across is the failure of most academics and book reviewers and book columnists and editorial writers to understand the role of the publisher. Particularly what I'm thinking about is the way in which a good publisher with a good editorial staff helps the author. And further I find the lack of understanding about how the publisher *originates* books (marries an idea to a writer) is quite astonishing. The really good publisher who is doing a proper job is always looking for the right person to do the kind of book the publisher wants to publish. The image of the publisher sitting back and waiting for manuscripts to cross his desk is prevalent and grossly distorted in most cases. Much of the problem in Canadian publishing lies in inability to have proper access to working capital. The federal and provincial governments could play an effective role in assisting the Canadian book publishing industry best of all not through grants and loans and giveaways or handouts but simply by providing guarantees for some moderate chartered bank capital. This would cost the governments very, very little.

MEL HURTIG