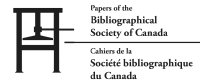


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REVIEWS

Ruth Panofsky, *Toronto Trailblazers: Women in Canadian Publishing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 304 pp., ISBN 9781487523862 (paperback), ISBN 9781487505578 (hardcover), ISBN 9781487532345 (e-book)

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Ruth Panofsky begins by quoting Leslie Howsam's assertion that technology is less the agent of change than the many individuals – including publishers, editors, and literary agents – whose work has shaped book culture (3). She follows with William H. Clarke's assertion that “the story of publishing in Canada, once you get past the figureheads, is a story of women” (3). These assertions hint at the story that follows.

Panofsky begins with a high-level overview of the roles that have historically been filled by women in the publishing trades and provides context by outlining several of the defining moments in Canadian publishing. Each chapter is a case study of one woman whose work in publishing has had an extraordinary impact, and what emerges is “a narrative of vision, determination, and resilience on the part of seven women who, by helping to shape the publishing industry over the course of the twentieth century, were instrumental in advancing modern literary culture for Canada” (29). Taken together, this collection of meticulously researched and beautifully written biographical studies offers new insights into publishing as it has evolved and developed in English Canada and redresses “the conspicuous absence of women from our gendered understanding of a publishing culture whose ‘structuring feature’ is ‘masculinity’” (29).

The first chapter tells the story of trailblazing publisher Irene Clarke (1903–86), a co-founder and a “formidable presence at the helm of Clarke, Irwin” (31) from its founding in 1930 to its demise in the 1980s. A maternalistic presence to whom people were *personally* drawn despite being somewhat fearful *professionally*, Clarke created a publishing house unlike any other, with a weekly afternoon tea and prohibitions on both smoking and alcohol at company events (33). An active and outspoken feminist, Clarke publicly asked other women of privilege to “remember that our duty is not only to ourselves but to the other larger community of women the world over” (34). Yet, as Panofsky demonstrates, the publisher “was untouched by the suffering of racialized groups” and “her class privilege and gendered experience allowed her to see only the difficulties facing white women like herself” (34). Among the many women authors that Clarke nurtured, the personal attention she gave to Emily Carr is particularly noteworthy, shaping “Carr’s brief but significant literary career” (43).

The second chapter profiles Eleanor Harman (1909–88), who got her start in publishing as Irene Clarke’s assistant and went on to have a unique career in which she had a hand in “nearly every aspect of publishing: apprenticing as a traveller, or sales representative, developing manuscripts and editing them, designing books, supervising production, writing promotional copy, dealing with the details of administration, training and encouraging staff, and writing books herself” (45), ultimately helping “to lead the University of Toronto Press through twenty-nine years of growth from a modest to a prestige publisher” (67). Mentored by Harman and others, Frances Halpenny (1919–2017), who went on to become the managing editor at the University of Toronto Press before becoming the general editor of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and “a major force in scholarly publishing in Canada” (69), is the focus of the third chapter.

Harman and Halpenny, who regularly lunched together at Eaton’s department store, “formed an alliance of two women who shared a commitment to refining editorial practice and an interest in editing as a scholarly subject” (56). Panofsky reveals that both were subjected to gender bias; for example, Harman was regularly treated as a secretary

despite being a senior officer of the press, and Halpenny faced sexism when she “was dissuaded from pursuing a doctorate in English” (69) and when she and other female editors were expected to make the tea for collegial gatherings (72). Both Harman and Halpenny developed strategies “to quietly disarm opposition to intellectual women operating in a man’s world” (72), a message that was underscored by their outstanding records of achievement. Panofsky demonstrates that Harman’s and Halpenny’s scholarship was not only groundbreaking in their time, but also helped to establish practices relating to publishing and scholarly inquiry that continue to this day.

Subsequent chapters explore the careers of trade editors Sybil Hutchinson (1902–92), Claire Pratt (1921–95), and Anna Porter (1943–), as well as literary agent Bella Pomer (1926–). Hutchinson, a promising writer – the protégée of Earle Birney – abandoned her own writing to earn a living. Hired as Eleanor Harman’s successor at Oxford University Press Canada, Hutchinson went on to become “Canada’s first female editor-in-chief” (88) as well as a pioneering literary agent, work she did from home in her limited spare time. Claire Pratt overcame disability to work as an editor with several publishing houses, but her most important legacies were her extensive editorial contributions to the New Canadian Library series published by McClelland and Stewart, and her work in helping to professionalize the role of the editor. Human rights advocate Anna Porter followed in Pratt’s footsteps as editor-in-chief at McClelland and Stewart, before taking on the role of president and editor-in-chief at Seal Books and eventually becoming “the first woman to co-found a publishing company devoted to Canadian literary non-fiction,” i.e., Key Porter Books (142). Meanwhile, Bella Pomer began as a subsidiary rights manager for the Macmillan Company of Canada and, in 1978, started her own literary agency, becoming one of the first full-time agents in Canada (155) and helping to “consolidate the role of the professional literary agent in Canada by mediating with editors and publishers and effecting significant improvements in conditions for authors” (152). In each of these chapters, Panofsky not only offers us the opportunity to get to know these trailblazing

women and understand their accomplishments, but also gives us a window on some of their most important and influential relationships, including Hutchinson's work as James Reaney's trusted editor and agent, Pratt's editorial interventions with Irving Layton, and Pomer's role in shaping Carol Shields's career.

This important book, "born of archival discoveries, enlightening interviews, and fortuitous secondary findings" (198), is a delightful read, full of wonderful insights and interconnections, and a necessary one for those who wish to gain a more complete understanding of the story of publishing in English Canada than has previously been available to us.

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