

Print Culture and English-Speaking Quebec

by Peter F. McNally

The role of English-speaking Quebecers in the cultural development of both Quebec and Canada generally tends to be overlooked, but in fact is too important to be ignored. This article discusses Anglophone Quebec's contribution to print culture in three time-periods: 1764-1820, 1820-1890, and 1890 to the present. However, many important aspects of this culture still require serious investigation or synthesis.

Le rôle des Québécois anglophones dans le développement culturel du Québec et du Canada a généralement tendance à ne pas être pris en considération, alors qu'il est trop important pour être ignoré. Cet article est consacré à la contribution des anglophones du Québec à la culture imprimée à trois époques: 1764-1820, 1820-1890 et 1890 à aujourd'hui. Il a reste toutefois que plusieurs aspects importants de cette culture doivent faire l'objet de recherches ou de synthèses sérieuses.

Anglophone Quebec's contribution to print culture in Quebec and Canada is in danger of falling among competing schools of opinion and, therefore, of becoming invisible. For some commentators, Quebec's anglophone culture is an irritating anomaly which distracts from the definition of the province as an exclusively French-speaking territory; for others, anglophone Quebec is viewed solely within a broader Canadian anglophone context, devoid of reference to the unique aspects of Quebec heritage; for yet others, anglophone Quebec is best ignored because of the complexity involved in dealing with such a difficult issue. Although these generalizations, like all generalizations, are overstated and admit to important exceptions there is a persistent sense, in some quarters, of anglophone Quebecers having been orphaned among competing solitudes. McTernan's two volume bibliography of French-language Quebec imprints, in the British Library (1992-93),¹ contributes to this sense. For most commentators, however, the role of English-speaking Quebecers in the cultural development of Quebec specifically, and Canada generally, is too important to be ignored; clearly no history of Canadian print culture can afford to overlook anglophone Quebec.

I. To 1820

Anglophone interest in Canada generally, and Quebec specifically, began during the French regime, as the bibliographies of Waldon² and Waterston³ make clear. There having been no printing press in New France, only in 1764 – with the beginning of the English regime – was printing introduced into the new province with a dynasty of English-speaking printers who dominated Quebec City's printing for the next 60 years: William Brown and Thomas Gilmore (1764-1773), William Brown (1773-1789), Samuel Neilson (1789-1793), and John Neilson (1793-1822).⁴ Although Canadian printing began in Halifax in 1751, Quebec City with its larger population and economic/political importance soon became the centre of printing in late 18th and early 19th century Canada. While slightly more than 50% of the books published in Quebec between 1764 and 1820 were in French, a press having been established in Montreal in 1776, the fact is that only 1,100 or so titles were actually printed. Anglophone titles accounted for 27% and bilingual English/French titles for 18%.

Recent studies have shown that the bulk of 18th

1791.
THE
MONTREAL
GAZETTE.



NUM. XXVI.
GAZETTE
DE
MONTREAL.

THURSDAY, JUNE 16.

JEUDI, 16 JUIN.

DUBLIN,
FEBRUARY 10.

DE PARIS, le 10 Février.
Blanc du Mercredi.

A CIRCUMSTANCE of a most dreadful nature has transpired within these few days:—A night or two ago, at a very late hour, two persons, seemingly gentlemen, drove themselves out in a postchaise to Churchtown, where there is a burial place, with a dead body confined up in the carriage. They rapped up the grave-digger, and told him, that under the disguise of night they had brought out a corpse to be interred, which in the day time, they apprehended might be arrested for debt, and for the burial of which he should have a guinea. The grave digger alledged he was unequal to the business himself; upon which these persons said they would give him half a guinea for an assistant, which was agreed to, and the corpse was accordingly left with the grave-digger. The latter immediately called up an assistant; but upon agreement they determined upon postponing the business till day light. When they arose in the morning, curiosity urged them to open the coffin, which on so doing—O! shocking to mention! they found the body of a man, in his clothes, with boots on, and his throat cut in a most frightful manner. In his pockets were found, six guineas and a watch; for the property of which these two persons differed, or else the transaction would probably have never come to light. The body remains at this place to be owned, which as yet, has not taken place; nor has any thing occurred which can lead to a discovery. Every eye-witness of this horrid, foul transaction, is praying for the development of the cruel perpetrators.

LONDON, February 10.

Extract of a letter from Petersburg, December 22.

At a Protestant meeting in Strasburg, the following prayer is offered up twice a day, for the national assembly:

“Almighty God! animate by thy power the deputies of the Frankish Cherish, in their hearts, in desirahle zeal which is so necessary to accelerate the accomplishment of our welfare be their guide! be their

Le nombre des ecclésiastiques qui avoient à l'assemblée nationale les procès-verbaux de la prestation de leur serment, croît tous les jours. M. le curé de Soupes a annoncé que dans le district de Nemours, pas un ecclésiastique ne s'étoit refusé à remplir ce devoir. “Qu'on life, a dit ce respectable pasteur, l'histoire ecclésiastique de l'abbé de Fleury, & l'on verra si la nouvelle constitution civile du clergé n'est pas fondée sur le plan de cette église primitive, essentiellement démocratique, & dont la discipline est toujours pour première règle cette maxime: *la voix du Peuple est la voix de Dieu—Vox Populi, Vox Dei.*”

Le départ des Mesdames, tantôt du Roi, tient toute la capitale en alarmes: Gouffas sur-tout dévoie depuis plusieurs jours la moitié de sa feuille pour démontrer que Mesdames ne doivent point partir. Il prétend que tout ce que ces princesses possèdent appartient à la nation, & il saisit toutes les réclamations qu'il fait de sa part de leur propriété, d'expressions qui ne sont pas très bonnes.

Quiconque nous pensions, comme M. Gouffas, qu'il seroit beaucoup mieux que Mesdames ne partissent pas, & que leur séjour en France peut imposer à la tranquillité du royaume, nous en nous servirons pas des mêmes argumens pour les inviter à rester: nous nous contenterons seulement d'observer à ces princesses, qui sont bien aines & sensées, qu'une fausse alerte peut quelquefois entraîner autant de malheurs que des alarmes fondées. Si elles ont trouvé des conseillers perçés ad-sein d'une patrie qui doit leur être chère, & à qui elles l'ont toujours été, à quoi ne doivent-elles pas s'attendre, quand elles ne seront entourées que de prêtres fanatiques & ennemis d'une constitution qui n'a enlevé aux ministres de l'évangile que les décorations fastueuses dont ils s'entouraient? S'ils ont été traités sévèrement par l'assemblée nationale, n'ont ils pas provoqué ce traitement? Dans tous les cas; ce n'est point de ceux qui ont cherché à renverser la constitution, que Mesdames peuvent recevoir les conseils

century Canadian printing revolved around newspapers and job printing such as printed forms, handbills, and broadsides.⁵ Of the seven newspapers published in 18th century Quebec, only two endured over time: the *Montreal Gazette* (initially franco-phone) and the *Quebec Gazette*. Both were bilingual publications, at various points in their history, before becoming unilingually English. Of the two magazines published in 18th century Canada, one appeared in Quebec, the bilingual *Quebec Magazine*, 1792–1794. The bulk of handbills and printed forms appeared in English.

Concerning the diffusion of publications in 18th century Quebec, both Montreal and Quebec City had libraries dating from the French regime, all of which were attached to religious institutions, such as hospitals and colleges, and none of which was designed to be available to the general public. The first to be open to the general public were bilingual subscription libraries, whose collections were more or less evenly divided between English and French language books: the Quebec Library opened by Governor Haldimand in Quebec City in 1779, and the Montreal Library opened in 1796.⁶ There is no evidence of bookstores in 18th century Quebec, except for those attached to printing establishments, and which probably also doubled as lending libraries. Personal libraries of significance emerged at an early date among anglophones.

II. 1820–1890

Although John Neilson continued to dominate Quebec City printing well into the 19th century, the focus of Quebec's anglophone publishing after 1820 switched to other parts of the province such as Three Rivers, and the Eastern Townships.⁷ Montreal, which had established itself as the economic and cultural metropolis of British North America, and had an anglophone majority between 1831 and 1865, emerged as the centre for English-language publishing not only in Quebec but all of Canada. This hegemony, which would endure up to 1890, was based upon both original publishing and unauthorized reprinting of British and American books, for which royalties would not be paid. The chaotic and uncooperative nature of Canadian, British, and

American copyright laws both permitted and encouraged such anarchy.

Montreal's two leading publishers were Dawson Brothers and John Lovell. Lovell was particularly significant, becoming Canada's leading publisher in English and French, as well as developing a significant presence in the United States. Even today the firm continues to enjoy an important role in the publishing of directories and other reference works. Dawsons was particularly active in publishing scholarly works, including the books of Sir John William Dawson, McGill University's great principal and Canada's leading intellectual/scientist of the 19th century. In time the Renouf publishing company would evolve from Dawsons. Although both Dawsons and Lovell indulged in issuing unauthorized editions of British and American works, they also printed authorized editions in co-operation with various foreign authors and publishers. As a reflection of its cultural and economic dynamism, Victorian Montreal became the leading Canadian publisher of English language legal and medical titles.⁸

English language periodical and newspaper publishing in Quebec during this period was particularly important. Montreal newspapers such as the *Gazette*, *Herald*, *Star* and *Witness* exerted national influence.⁹ Local English language newspapers could be found in Quebec City and other centres across the province. Montreal magazines played an considerable role in the development of an indigenous English Canadian tradition of periodical publishing. The *Literary Garland* (1838–1851) was the country's first literary journal, in English or French, to enjoy real longevity. *Snow Drop* (1847–1853) was the earliest Canadian children's magazine.¹⁰ Following Confederation, the *Canadian Illustrated News* (1869–1883) was the young nation's first illustrated magazine and the first in the world to make use of half-tone technology in reproducing illustrations.¹¹

In the diffusion of printed materials, 19th century English-speaking Quebec also displayed verve and energy, with Montreal being the focal point of activity. Of the approximately 165 libraries that emerged in Montreal during the century, around 50% were anglophone.¹² The most significant were probably the McGill University Library, the Fraser-Hickson

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FARISH CHURCH OF NOIRE DAMF, MONTREAL. From a photograph by Leggo & Co.—SEE PAGE 428.

Library and the Mechanics' Institute Library.¹³ Important private collectors emerged during this era, of whom Peter Redpath is probably the most important, with his outstanding collection of 17th, 18th, and 19th century British Tracts given to McGill University. Although the community was largely insulated from the more extreme aspects of the lay/clerical struggle that tore apart the francophone community during the fight over the library of L'Institut canadien, this struggle would effectively thwart any attempts to found a public library in Montreal until the next century. A large number of anglophone bookstores developed during the 19th century, but have received little if any study.

III. 1890 to the Present

In the 1890s, with the harmonization of copyright laws and protection in Canada, Britain, and the United States, there ended the unauthorized reprinting, without royalties, of books published in the three countries. This coincided with the shift of Canada's English language publishing centre from Montreal to Toronto, where both indigenous local publishers and branch offices of British and American firms established themselves. Although some local anglophone publishers, such as Lovell and Dawson/Renouf, have continued in Montreal from the 19th century they have concentrated, like most of the English language publishers established during the last one hundred years or so, upon specialized markets rather than national mass markets. Virtually all anglophone publishing over the last century has been concentrated in Montreal. That said, publishing and other aspects of English language print culture in the province continue to maintain themselves despite the shrinking size of the community and the relative economic decline of Montreal.

At the turn of the century, the McGill University Library inaugurated the reprint series, the McGill University Publications, which is an important precursor of academic publishing in this country.¹⁴ In fact, the series is the direct ancestor of the McGill University Press, established in 1960 and reorganized as the McGill-Queen's press in 1968. Run jointly by McGill and Queen's University, the press is one of the largest and most pres-

tigious academic publishers in Canada. Other notable general anglophone publishers were/are Louis Carrier/Mercury (c.1920-1931), Harvest House (1960-), Vehicule (1973-), Eden (1980s), Robert Davids (1992-).

In addition, several specialized presses have developed such as Tundra (children's, 1967) and Black Rose (left wing politics, 1970-). Reference should also be made to the large number of small literary presses appearing in Montreal during and after World War II: First Statement, Contact, Delta Canada, New Delta, Muses's Company, Guernica, and NuAge, to name a few. In fact, for a period during the 1950s and 60s Montreal may well have been English-speaking Canada's literary/poetry publishing capital. Finally it should be noted that newspapers will publish books on occasion, and that a host of minor imprints have risen and fallen over the decades. At the very least, English-speaking Montreal continues to be a significant regional publishing centre with some national impact.

Periodical publishing in English has undergone great change over the past one-hundred years. The *McGill University Magazine* (1901-1906) and its more famous successor the *University Magazine* (1907-1920) were amongst the most important Canadian journals of informed opinion and general culture in the first two decades of this century.¹⁵ From c.1950 to 1979, *Weekend Magazine* was published by the *Montreal Star* as a glossy pictorial weekend supplement that appeared in newspapers across the country and was read weekly by millions of Canadians. For some decades after World War II, *Time Magazine* published a Canadian edition in Montreal. Since 1958, *Reader's Digest* has been publishing its Canadian editions - English and French - in Montreal. Otherwise the only periodicals published in Montreal that have enjoyed national prominence have been literary titles such as the *McGill Fortnightly* (1920s), and others issued by the small literary presses mentioned earlier. A publication devoted to the study of print culture in English-speaking Quebec is *Fontanus, from the Collections of McGill University, 1988-*. Newspaper publishing has continued to be a major factor in the anglophone cultural presence. Although the number of dailies has steadily declined during this century, so that only two now remain, the *Montreal Gazette*



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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
OF CANADA

and the *Sherbrooke Record*, many weeklies continue both on the Island of Montreal and elsewhere in the province.

The diffusion of printed material continues to be a central concern of the anglophone community. In 1893, the province's first specifically designed library building was opened with the inauguration of Redpath Library at McGill University. McGill continues to possess Quebec's largest academic library, with a wealth of research collections – many the gifts of local collectors. Among these research collections are two of particular importance to the study of Canadian print culture: the Canadiana collections and the Colgate Printing Collection. There are a number of other academic libraries at Concordia University and anglophone CEGEPS, or community colleges. The list of Montreal head offices with libraries, which was once sizeable, has shrunk as the city has declined in importance as a financial centre. In 1899, Quebec's first tax-supported public library was opened in the largely English-speaking Montreal suburb of Westmount.¹⁶ In the early years of this century, McGill operated the McLennan Travelling Library, which provided books for rural Quebec and the rest of the country until its provincial government grant ceased in 1970. In a province that is only slowly developing a public library system, the anglophone communities are frequently characterized by their libraries. Montreal's Jewish community has developed an excellent library.¹⁷

In 1904, McGill inaugurated Canada's first formal educational programme for librarianship, which also enjoys the distinction of being the oldest university based programme in the world, outside the United States.¹⁸ In 1930, it published the first bibliography of Canadian bibliographies.¹⁹ A wide range of English language bookstores can be found in Quebec, mostly in the Montreal region. The Classic Book chain, c.1950–1980, a major force in Canadian retailing, was centered in Montreal. The city has also had outstanding and colourful antiquarian book dealers, of whom Bernard Amtmann was an outstanding example. His Montreal Book Auctions were of national significance through the 1960s and 70s.²⁰

As the footnotes will show, this survey has been based upon a relatively narrow research base. That

said, many important aspects of Quebec's anglophone print culture still require serious investigation of synthesis: literacy and education,²¹ native peoples, publishers and printers, bookstores and other forms of distribution, censorship, and libraries of all sorts including personal libraries. Attention should also be paid to the print culture of Quebec's ethnic communities, other than English or French-speaking. The real need is, however, for a synthesis of the history of Quebec's anglophone and franco-phone print culture that respects both their unique and shared qualities.

Notes

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