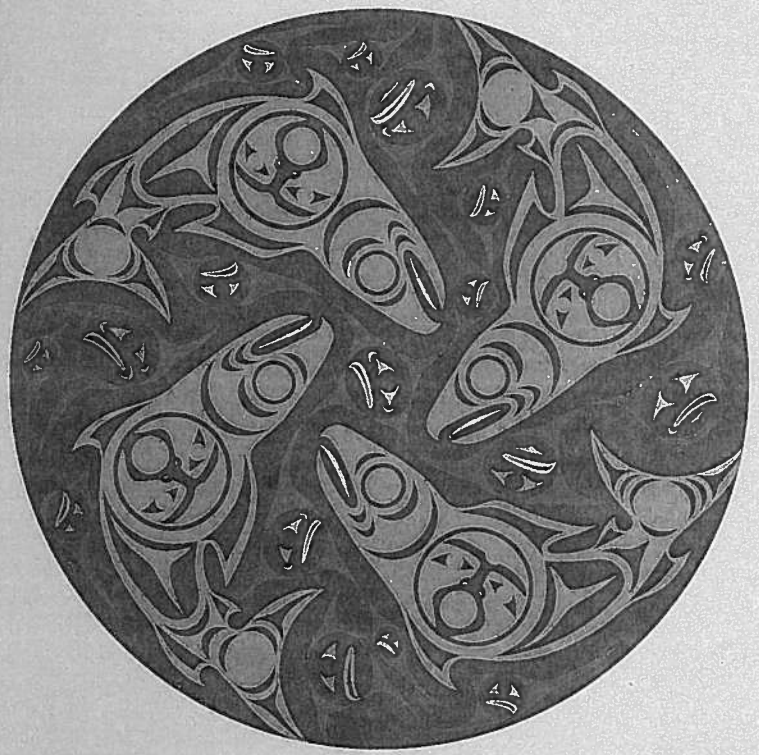
Cross / Cultures 25

ifference and Community

Canadian and European Cultural Perspectives



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Alternative Publishing in Canada

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CANADA IS A COUNTRY where many of the political, legal, and social structures are supported by what are still predominantly print-based media. This status raises the question of how the people who have difficulty getting access to print can participate in their society. Canada is a "print society" in the sense that writing, which for various sociohistorical and geographical reasons is the primary mode of communication, is transmitted via print even in the scripts read out during the television news; testable knowledge leading to qualifications for work is acquired through print from libraries, school manuals and in exams; legal and political guidelines are integrated from the printed works of jurisprudence and constitutional issues, and adequate day-to-day existence functions by printed means in shops and hospitals, on insurance forms and breakfast-cereal packets. Print is not the only medium for communication or the most obviously persuasive and engaging medium of culture, but its ubiquity renders it the necessary means for participating fully in society.

A print society begins with education and with literacy, which gives technical training in both "creative" and decorous writing and reading, as well as learning about the value and usefulness of communicating through words. Print society also supports all the aspects of production, publishing, distribution, marketing and sales, as well as the professionalisation of writing, of authorship, copyright and censorship, and the formation of readerships, audiences, patrons, reviews and rewards. The centrality of print and of graphical communication means that many communities are effectively marginalised in society because of difficulty of access to even just one part of the whole complex procedure: whether it be to those parts of production and dissemination of the printed product casually referred to as "publishing" and operating under economic strictures, or to the more subtle strictures on cultural consumption.

Problems of access to print as a producer

The publishing edifice is not at all easy to shift, because it is fundamentally tied into the economic practices of a country, in this case Canada. The economics are based on the bottom-line fact that publishers are not altruistic. Publishing was one of the earliest capitalist ventures and has survived by virtue of a thorough understanding and exploitation of the underlying economic practices of capitalism;

printers simply run factories; booksellers will only stock items they think will sell; and that factor depends on readers with a regular disposable income. The only way to break this central control over production is to publish writing yourself, or print it yourself, or sell it yourself. There are two provisos: first, you have to be sure of an audience; and second, you need to be able to afford the cost of printing.

The history of book production has been closely tied to the ups and downs in the cost of printing. Since the late-fifteenth century there has been a decreasing emphasis on the costs of paper and of printing or the actual costs of production before profit, with more and more of the financial reward going to the publisher and bookseller along with their associated editors, designers, marketers and so on. Yet, in Canada, until the advent of the cyclostyles and mimeographs of the Fifties, access to print in any substantial way was not a possibility for the majority of the population. People could produce items cheap enough for you to buy and read, such as booklets, newspapers and magazines. Individuals could perhaps afford to produce one-off items. But there was no regular access to production, as a means of interacting with a readership or an audience: printing presses, even before the hugely capital-intensive power-driven presses which arrived in the nineteenth century, were simply too expensive. More recently, with photocopying and computer printouts, and now with desktop publishing, access to print is broadening.

Problems of access to print as a consumer

There is no point having cheap, accessible print if there is no writer or audience. In Canada, literacy, or acquired skill in writing and reading, is the central aim of the educational system. This literacy may form the basis for learning in mathematics and science, or for skill in other communicative media, but in its primary focus on writing and reading the educational system is training people in the skills necessary for functioning within its print society. However, literacy is difficult to talk about, and becomes problematical, because desiring literacy presupposes a desire to be part of that society; it takes for granted a community of shared expression and experience that may well not exist. It is estimated that 25% of the adult Canadian population is functionally illiterate.[1] However, included in this number are those who are technically illiterate, and those who are non-literate in that, while they can read and write, they do not recognise or possibly accept that writing/reading is a helpful way of communicating.[2] Accounts offered on the basis of literacy education programmes speak of literacy work as not only providing

1 *Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate* (Toronto: Southam Newspaper Group, 1988).

2 Jennifer Horsman, *Something In My Mind Besides the Everyday* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1990).

access to an audience but creating an audience in the first place.[3] Many of those who do not communicate via writing and reading or through the print medium, which is the primary way we disseminate this expression, have no community – but it is a moot point whether they are non-literate because they have no community or whether they have no community because they are non-literate and excluded from access.

In 1959 the federal government of Canada began a programme of funding through the Canada Council for publishers and writers, although they chose not to fund readers directly through subsidy to bookstores. Later, in 1972, the then Multicultural section of the department of the Secretary of State was established, and in 1973 began to fund diverse groups, usually along racial or ethnic lines, for cultural expression.[4] The Canada Council grants encouraged an increasing flow of slim volumes from the emerging public–private presses, many of which derived from initial university sponsorship. Because the grants made it possible to produce these books cheaply, the bookstores were encouraged to take a risk on stocking them.[5] However, access to a market was still restricted: Canadian books still make up only 20% of sales in Canada as opposed to national sales of 90% in countries such as Great Britain or the USA.[6] In addition, the Department of Multiculturalism, as it became, put questions of literacy and training on the agenda. Although there has been considerable worry about the status of multicultural grants, which both writers and publishers often take to indicate second-rate work, this funding has opened up access particularly to communities outside the universities, and increasingly people have begun to take up the opportunity.

Further federal steps which aided the development of publishing work from groups with otherwise marginal access to print were the establishing of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1973), and of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1967) and the Native Citizens' Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State (late Seventies). Both sources were eventually able to provide financial aid for the costs in publishing. Provincial developments have been primarily related to educational and literacy programmes, as well as to the establishing of creative writing elements in schooling from primary to tertiary levels of teaching,[7] and some provinces have

3 *Women & Literacy*, special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 9.3–4 (Fall–Winter, 1988); all quotations are taken from this issue and page numbers follow in brackets.

4 See Lynette Hunter, "Writing, Literature and Ideology," in *Probing Canadian Culture*, ed Peter Easingwood, Konrad Gross & Wolfgang Klooss (Augsburg: AV-Verlag, 1991): 52–64.

5 Hunter, "Writing, Literature and Ideology," 52–64.

6 Frank Davey, "Writers and Publishers in English–Canadian Literature," in Davey, *Reading Canadian Reading* (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1988): 90.

7 A brief look at the "Language Arts" section in the book catalogue for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education indicates the range of some of this teaching.

also provided support for specific groups through, for example, the Ontario Women's Directorate. Provinces have also been instrumental in funding posts for writers in residence at colleges and universities, for writers in libraries, and for writing instruction in community programmes.[8] An example of one comprehensive programme is that run by the Saskatchewan Writer's Guild, which provides short-term writer residencies in elementary and high schools, in libraries, in communities around the province, and an apprenticeship programme "where a writer with some publications etc is teamed with a senior writer for [...] three months correspondence."[9] The Saskatchewan Arts Board funds the Sage Hills (formerly Fort San) writing school, which offers residential courses for intermediate and advanced writing, and a manuscript reading service.

The result of these government initiatives to fund both literacy development and access to publishing has been an enormous growth of publications over the last twenty years from groups within the community who have in the past experienced difficulty of access to the written medium and its printed means of dissemination. That growth has highlighted specific aspects of the problem of access which I shall now be examining further. It has also produced, and is continuing to produce, a substantial body of writing that is offering new ways of reading, and new relationships between writer, text and reader, which are starting to shape new genres and communities.

My central concern is with the development of access to publishing and to literacy in Canada since the late Fifties. Also important are the effects of the marginalisation of people from, and the participation of people in, the communities of Canada's print society. It is possible through grant-giving programmes to encourage an easing of economic and cultural restrictions on access, which may loosen the power structures of a dominant ideology. It is particularly possible to ease restrictions on access for writings and readings that understand and accept the aims and limitations of literacy and the print society that underwrites it. However, it is far more difficult to ease restrictions on access for those people who do not fit into, or may actively reject, those aims and limitations: through participation in, for example, oral social media; through disagreement with the ideological implications of the dominant medium; or through lack of opportunity and support. These groups are often represented as being fundamentally ignorant, whereas their

8 For example, the Ontario provincial government has funded a Writers in Residence programme for provincial libraries from 1985 onwards.

9 This quotation and much of the surrounding detail has been taken from correspondence with Bonnie Burnard, who works for the Saskatchewan Arts Board.

communication is in effect being repressed. What is significant at the moment is that, while access to production is opening up slightly to these doubly marginalised groups, access to writing and reading/consumption is being complicated by an inability on the part of trained readers in the institution to engage with and respond to writings from the newly literate community.

The first area of focus concerns difficulties of access to production and print distribution in relevant communities; I shall briefly consider some problems of consumption created by language and cultural difference, differences of ethnicity and race, oral communicative culture, sexuality and gender. The discussion will then move on to look at some difficulties of access to production – more specifically, to consumption in a variety of women's communities and in the recently defined area of literacy and women, which describes a high proportion of newly literate writers, or people beginning to engage with Canada's print society.

Research on the relationship between publishing and writing/reading usually refers to periods prior to 1950.[10] In an effort to provide a methodological basis for a relatively new field of inquiry, the research has often been systematic, building comprehensive and coherent structures around available facts.[11] What follows here is, by contrast, analytical of specific observed difficulties. Any such analytical approach must be general rather than abstract, and can only provide marginal commentaries with indications of further sites for study.

Language, culture, ethnicity and race

In Canada, probably the best-recognised groups of writers and readers marginalised from print are those of ethnic immigrants from Europe. Many members of groups such as those from Germany, Italy, the Ukraine or Poland come from cultures firmly literate in a broad Western rhetorical tradition, and are highly educated in their own language and literature. They are used to a culture that

10 See Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), which refers to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century period, or the classic if outdated study by Richard Altick of nineteenth-century British texts, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957). The conference held at the University of Toronto in April 1990, "Discourse Pre-1860," brought together some discussion of the history of Canadian texts, as have the conferences organised by the Research Institute for Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta.

11 Robert Darnton, following the French scholars LeFebvre and Martin, offers an economic system of relationships for British printing in "What is the History of the Book?," in *Books and Society in History: Preconference Papers*, ed. Kenneth E. Carpenter (Sevenoaks: Bowker/Butterworth, 1983); and Milan Dimic & Marguerite Itaman Garstin, following Itamar Even–Zohar, offer a sociohistorical polysystem theory to their Canadian colleagues in "Polysystem Theory," in *Problems of Literary Reception*, ed. Edward Blodgett & Alfred Purdy (Edmonton: Research Institute for Comparative Literature, 1988).

values printed products, if not in all cases a print society which mediates its ideologies primarily through print, and they understand the acceptance and authorisation that it permits/conveys to the written word and its author. Over the last thirty years, as the background lists from the Department of Multiculturalism indicate,[12] some of these writers have acquired English or French and have passed their writing on in the form of translated work that can then gain a broader social audience. Certainly, language is one of the most significant factors in their attempt to gain access to publishing. But acquiring the official language of the country is not the only problem of this community in relation to print.[13] The patterns of immigrant demography indicate that in most major Canadian cities immigrants with a language in common tend to live near to each other, often acquiring only a rudimentary or superficial understanding of the majority language.[14] This is particularly common among women who work in the home and among elderly citizens, neither of which group has to, or can, go outside of a local neighbourhood. The fact remains that there is also a pressing need for access to publication of work in their own languages.[15]

A pattern of moving from a beginning in local publishing, which has emerged in the Italian–Canadian community, is found in several other communities such as the Ukrainians in the prairies.[16] Many communities have produced mimeographed or photocopied material for local newsletters carrying stories, poems, letters, local news and so on. Some people then go on to produce community magazines, or one-off books of specific interest to the area about family, history, biography or immediate pragmatic information, which are distributed in church basements,

12 The Department of Multiculturalism has published a number of "Preliminary Surveys" to a variety of immigrant literatures since the late Eighties, including Canadian–Hungarian, Canadian–Italian, and Canadian–Hispanic. Most of the early publications appear to have been edited by Michael Batts.

13 Francis Caccia outlines some of the various linguistic needs of a community in "The Italian Writer and Language," tr. Martine Leprince, in *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian Canadian Writing*, ed. Joseph Pivato (Montreal: Guernica, 1985).

14 In a collection that frequently refers to patterns of urban habitation of immigrant groups, *Two Nations, Many Cultures: Ethnic Groups in Canada*, ed. Jean Leonard Elliott (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice–Hall, 1979), the article by Alexander Matejko, for example, "Multiculturalism: The Polish–Canadian Case," notes that among the most important reasons for "preference for living in an area where most people were of the same ethnic group" were "language difficulties" (243).

15 Such a need, which became clear to me from a number of personal interviews conducted during August 1989, is formally presented in, for example, "Immigrants and Political Involvement in Canada: The Role of the Ethnic Media," Jerome Black & Christiane Leithner, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20.1 (1988).

16 Personal communication from Professor Joseph Pivato, who was kind enough to spend considerable time with me during a research trip to Canada in 1989, outlining various areas of importance to the development of ethnic literatures in Canada from which some of the immediately following observations are drawn.

local shops, or through advertisements and notices in community and ethnic newsletters. As the producers acquire skills in the publishing process, some go on to form their own publishing businesses; and as the works produced begin to look like books of commercial publishing quality, the writers acquire authorised reputations and may be snapped up by other more established publishers – causing much resentment in the smaller publishers who took the initial risk on them.[17]

But it is clear that language is an important breaking-point. A short bibliography of Italian–Canadian literature produced by Joseph Pivato indicates, in its comparison of the original Italian-language publication with the invariably later English or French-language translation, that it is normally in the translated version that the work finds a commercial publisher.[18] Another form taken by this phenomenon is illustrated by *Ricordi: Things Remembered*, an anthology of short stories about the Italian experience in Canada. Although it has already benefitted from a grant from Multicultural that has made it possible for Guernica to produce it, the two stories in languages other than English (Italian and French) have been translated. This is not to say that commercial publication of Italian- (or other) language books does not happen, but it is comparatively infrequent. A publisher is not going to risk money on a commercial publication which may sell poorly because it is written in a minority language.

A recent interesting development that underscores the problem of language is that of the English-language writers in Quebec, particularly since 1976.[19] Several well-known English-language writers, and publishers who focused on English-language work, left Quebec during the Seventies. Many of those who remained or emerged subsequently often felt obstructed from access to publication. The provincial government gives grants less frequently to other-language than to francophone writers.[20] Both the majority surrounding French-language culture of communication in newspapers, magazines and other media, and even some of the English-language media that might have been expected to provide a forum for reviews and recognition, have been reluctant to do so. Just as reluctant have been the broader

17 This, of course, is a common concern for all small presses, which seem to get caught up in a vicious circle of being funded by the government to publish special interest books that major publishers will not pick up, thus establishing themselves as small presses by definition, from which writers wish to move on.

18 This bibliography was contained in a private paper, but a look at the *Newsletter/Bulletin of the Association of Italian–Canadian Writers* 10 (September 1989): 3, provides similar information.

19 1976 was the year during which Bill 101 was passed, making French the only official language in Quebec.

20 For example, it is notable that Gail Scott's *Heroine* (Toronto: Coach House, 1987) acknowledges help from the federal government and from the Ontario Arts Council, as well as from the Ministère des affaires culturelles in Quebec. Indeed, this is partly interesting because it is one of the few English-language books to note such provincial assistance.

English-language media in Canada as a whole[21] – to the extent that Linda Leith, editor of the primarily English-language *Matrix*, states that in interviewing

> dozens of writers, critics, editors and publishers in 1987 and early 1988 I found an overwhelming number of otherwise well-read and well-informed Canadians and Quebecers, French and English, unable to name even one new fiction writer in the English language from Quebec.[22]

There is now an organisation, QUSPEL, which concentrates on raising public consciousness of English-language writers in Quebec. That the cultural politics of Quebec is only to a lesser degree repeating the repressive actions of those it intends to criticise elsewhere in Canada does not make it any easier for these writers or their readers.

Another group marginalised from access to publishing, but also from highly literate cultures, is made up of more recently arrived immigrant groups from the Caribbean, from Central and Eastern Asia, and from South America. Attempts to break into the publishing circle of production follow roughly the same pattern – from photocopied or print-out community newsletters to magazines and specialised books, and, to a certain extent, to small publishing houses. This movement from newspapers to magazine to book is also the pattern followed in many other parts of the world and at earlier times. Partly due to the intensely local interest of newspapers, which ensures a reasonable number of sales, this medium can have far less risk for the capital investor; and with the cheaper printing methods of today the risk is even smaller.[23] But apart from this rough consistency the immigrant groups have little in common bar their profound cultural differences within the majority society.

There are, of course, often problems of language and translation which exacerbate publishing problems, particularly in the area of Chinese and Japanese, which have, respectively, pictorial and syllabic alphabets; Chinese has over 48,000 characters, and computers have only recently begun to provide help at an affordable cost. Yet some of the most intense problems stem from Asian and African–

21 From personal interview, it was clear that English-language writers in Montreal noted that even the English-language *Gazette* rarely reviewed their work – although, with a new editor at the desk in the Nineties, this may change.

22 Quoted from a typescript copy, but published as: Linda Leith, "Quebec Fiction in English During the 1980s: A Case Study in Marginality," *Quebec Studies* 9 (Fall, 1989).

23 The procedure is outlined in John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1985), and has been borne out by a number of case studies, including Lynette Hunter, "Publishing and Provincial Taste," in *Traditional Food East and West of the Pennines*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991).

Caribbean groups who have received at least part of their education in English.[24] Again, the communities frequently have sophisticated, literate and formally educated members, but the fact that they hold a language and a literary tradition in common with the broader society serves to underscore rather than ameliorate cultural difference. The stylistic play of much of this writing foregrounds radical divisions between the traditions and expectations of the incoming and in-place communities. Because it asks for translation not from one language to another (with the attendant acceptance of any error involved), but for "translation" within one language, there is no escaping the immediate implications for the host culture of the incoming difference.[25] Here again, commercial publishers have been slow to take up writers, but not so much because of a language difference. The reluctance in this case seems to be profoundly cultural and at least residually racial.[26]

From the outside the picture is complex: Multicultural grants aided both writers from ethnic European groups and writers from immigrant groups from the Third World, who would otherwise not be able to publish commercially acceptable products that can be sold in bookshops and kept in libraries. For many, aid from Multicultural is a stepping-stone on the way from local papers and self-publishing to being published by more established presses with aid from the Canada Council or from Provincial Arts Councils. But there is still, within these communities, a substantial gender divide and an insistently rankling race and class divide that the application of such aid has often failed to address.

Oral Communities

A different set of difficulties about access to publishing emerges from the Aboriginal communities. For communities which have a relatively short history of emphasis on media for writing, offering print as a viable medium is not a self-evident path to social participation. Furthermore, the communities are not primarily in the large urban centres of Canada, but are spread over huge distances, and often without a readily disposable financial income. The pattern of self-publishing is similar to those in urban centres, in that many newsletters and newspapers are produced, and a number of bands have started up publishing houses for book production, although some have closed; but what is missing are

24 There is also a substantial population that is francophone. For an introductory guide to this field, see Ronald Sutherland, "No Longer a Family Affair: Ethnic Writers of French Canada," given as a paper at the conference on Canadian Literature in Catania, Italy, 1987.

25 See Lynette Hunter, "After Modernism: Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, Marlene Nourbese Philip," given as a paper at the European Association for the study of Commonwealth Literature, in Lecce, Italy, 1990; published in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62.2 (1992/93): 256–81.

26 See Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism & Anti-Racism in the Arts," *Fuse* 12.5 (April/May, 1989): 13.

magazines or other more substantial periodicals.[27] Magazines need an efficient and regular distribution system and an audience with significantly more income to spend than on a newspaper. It may well be that the costs of transport into rural areas and the relatively low sales within what are small communities in any case, simply make this form of publishing impracticable. Radio is a far more sensible medium for distance communication, as would be telephone-linked computer magazines in community/band centres.[28]

Possibly more important is the question of the appropriateness of the written medium at all. Aboriginal linguistic cultures were primarily oral until the twentieth century. The Moravian church missionaries established orthographies for several languages in the late eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century syllabic systems were introduced.[29] But given the almost insuperable production and distribution problems posed by large distances and poor transport for heavy objects made of paper, and given the non-capitalist economy of the tribal system, when capital is vital to the investment risk and profit-taking of the modern book industry, there would have been little use in employing the graphic systems at all except where fixed records were perceived as necessary.

The concept raises a primary cultural contradiction: on the one side, we have the fact-orientated denotative world of European informational systems, which both rely on, and provide the economic *raison d'être* for, the printed medium, with its associated modes of morphemic and syntactic copyright ownership and subject-based textual authorship; on the other, we have a world of orally transmitted knowledge, with its own modes of narratorial copyright and collective performative production.[30] The contradiction is extended into the controlling financial concept of edition: the fixed text or edition has allowed for the commodification of writing as well as for a broad social access that was impossible in an oral mode of communication before technological media. It has engaged in a positive fight against censorship and information restriction, yet has also often become a tool of control. But if texts are to be produced that are appropriate to the

27 For example, of the few publications about an Aboriginal audience stocked by the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association, even fewer appeared to be for that audience.

28 The efforts of Eugene Steinhauer, a Cree, in this area eventually led to the establishment of the Alberta Native Communications Society in 1968, and by 1984 there were thirteen native communications societies: see Robert J. Rupert, "Native People, Communications," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985), vol. 2: 1212.

29 This account is now often given in the prefaces to relevant collections of literature such as *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*, ed. Penny Petrone (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988), or the series on *Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics*, ed. H.C. Wolfart (Winnipeg: Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics).

30 See Leonore Keeshig–Tobias, "The Magic of Others," in *Language in her Eye*, ed. Libby Scheier, Sheila Sheard & Eleanor Wachtel (Toronto: Coach House, 1990): 173–77.

contingencies of specific place, occasion and audience, then a fixed medium for the text is not suitable.[31]

This contradiction lies at the heart of a dispute that rumbled during the Eighties throughout the Canadian writing community. Some Aboriginal writers are objecting to the use of Aboriginal stories and even to the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginals; others, perceiving the value of at least raising the general social consciousness about Aboriginal communities, particularly in portraying Aboriginal peoples in film or novel, have no such misgivings.[32] But there is a recognisable difference between the arguably racist portrayals of W. Kinsella's stories and the social conscience of Joan Clark's work. The depth of feeling on this issue cannot easily be grasped by people with little notion either of the social responsibility required in the use of stories or of their sacred uses.[33] A close cultural transposition might be effected by suggesting that, just as the appropriation of an individual's words out of context may in Western European countries be considered libellous and defamatory to that person, so appropriation of a group's narrative out of context may be demeaning. The centre of such a translated debate is the context within which appropriateness (or not) is assessed. To insist that the context should be that of the dominant social order is racist. At the Feminist Bookfair in Montreal, June 1988, the question came to an acute point: Lee-Maracle, an Aboriginal writer, by saying that no white writer of any kind should use Aboriginal stories, mounted an argument against Anne Cameron, who is white yet married to a Aboriginal and with adopted Haida daughters. Cameron did "move over" from the practice and went on to write about racism.[34]

Nevertheless, participation in Canadian society is predicated upon written skills, and the Aboriginal communities appear to be divided about whether they should be writing at all, let alone writing in English. The situation is compounded by the history of transmission of some texts which have been recently recuperated by Aboriginal writers: stories told orally in Aboriginal languages to nineteenth-

31 For an account of some similar cultural problems arising in New Zealand with reference to the predominantly oral Maori culture, see Don MacKenzie, "The Sociology of a Text: Orality, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand," *The Library*, 6th Series, 6.4 (December, 1984): 333–65. Barbara Godard covers some of this ground in "Voicing Difference: The Literary Production of Native Women," in *A Mazing Space* ed. Shirley Neuman & Smaro Kamboureli (Edmonton: NeWest, 1986): 87–107.

32 See, for example, accounts of Lenore Keeshig–Tobias' accusations of subtle racism in the film *Where the Spirit Lives*, made in 1989 by the non-Aboriginal Keith Leckie yet acted in and supported by many Aboriginal people.

33 A matter all too well underlined by the extent to which it has been taken over by Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

34 From an interview with Julia Emberley, who researches Aboriginal writings and attended the bookfair; also now documented in *Telling It*, ed. Telling It Collective (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990).

century anthropologists and taken down by translation into written English have been translated back into present-day oral Aboriginal languages and then in some cases rendered into written syllabic form and published. The confusion of such transmission possibly achieves a sense of necessary collective authorship, and it also calls into question copyright of any kind. The apparent inadequacy of print to Aboriginal cultures has permitted the federal government to be lax about support for publication, which in turn has excluding effects on social and political participation.[35] But over the last ten to twenty years, with an increasingly book-educated populace, the Aboriginal communities have begun to get more involved in establishing some kind of access. Aboriginal papers such as the *Wataway News*, which is a bilingual English/Cree publication, often include poetry and short fiction as well as the usual news, sport and advertising; and some initially band-connected presses such as Theytus and Pemmican have become commercial publishers. But the problems that the Aboriginal communities have with access to publishing are particularly acute because there is no tradition of privilege for writing or authorship, which has been the historical bridge between the individual literary communication and social participation.

Sexuality

Although each provides a different focus on the problems of access to publishing, the groups discussed above all have a fairly well-defined community and audience that is recognised by religion, language, colour or race,[36] and which is more or less susceptible to traditional modes of print distribution. But the moment that the location for community becomes nebulous, as in the case of individuals with a sexual orientation outside the socially accepted norms, such as the gay and lesbian communities, questions of access focus on marketing and sales. Many members of these communities are, again, highly literate and formally educated. Language and writing is not the most pressing problem of access, although those factors represent an ideological hegemony which individuals may not want to be part of. The rejection of that hegemony has resulted in the emergence of some magazines focusing on linguistic and literary experiment.[37] However, the massive social rejection of homosexual behaviour in Canada does mean that there are distinct

35 For example, Lee Maracle's *I am woman* could not find a commercial publisher and was published by Write-On Press, formed specifically for the occasion.

36 This is probably one of the main factors behind the focus on precisely these communities, of the conference on "Literatures of Lesser Diffusion" held by the History of the Literary Institution group at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, in April 1987. A description of this conference may be found in *Update* 4 (August 1988).

37 For example, see *(f.) Lip: a newsletter of feminist innovative writing*, which is not specifically lesbian, but provides a space for women, lesbian and heterosexual, to explore language.

problems in establishing a focused location for distribution of printed material: in other words, where do lesbians and/or gays meet? And is it possible to sell books in these locations?

For this community there are no necessarily common meeting-grounds in places of religious observance, in distinctive areas of habitation, or in community centres. Furthermore, many commercial bookstores refuse to stock homosexual publications and most certainly refuse to display them as such, often considering them to be pornographic. Mail-order distribution is one solution, if the publisher can purchase a relevant sales list or can rely on swift word-of-mouth information. The fact that magazines rather than local newspapers are more typical of the community underwrites the appropriateness of mail-order sales, which in Canada are favourable to this form of periodical publication. Another avenue which requires considerable capital risk is the setting up of independent bookstores specifically to stock and sell printed material to this community. There are a few bookstores in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and elsewhere which have been established to fill this gap in the publishing world and which seem to have found a well-heeled audience.[38] They have come to fill a social gap as well, in providing the urban community with a location or meeting-place for the exchange of news and information, although rural individuals are still extremely isolated. But this response to difficulties of access has not been without trouble. In the early Eighties a Toronto bookstore, Body Politic, had its subscription list as well as much of its stock seized; and there are a number of court cases currently underway involving bookstores and censorship.

Given the social antipathy, which means that few grants are given to gay/lesbian writers or publishers *in support* of their social difference, it has also been difficult to establish commercial presses, most of which do need initial grant funding to start up. Some presses have emerged from the feminist community concerned with a lesbian agenda,[39] and some have arisen in response to the rather arbitrary censorship that is exercised on imports of printed material from the United States. Customs officers are empowered to seize material considered by them to be dangerous or obscene, even from private individuals crossing the border. Although more research into the implications and results of this policy is

38 Among the better known bookstores are Toronto's and Vancouver's Women's Bookstore, L'Androgyne, Ariel, Little Sisters, and Peregrine Books.

39 Press Gang in Vancouver and Ragweed in Prince Edward Island both encourage work from the lesbian community. Press Gang's publicity leaflet specifically states that it is trying to "demystify the printing process"; and printing has traditionally been a highly protected trade union activity, see Cynthia Coburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto, 1983).

needed, not only with regard to the gay/lesbian community, it seems likely that one effect is to encourage the publication of such material in Canada itself.

Gender

Another group marginalised from the print society by the ephemeral aspects of its community within the current ideology of Canada is that of women. Well-organised responses to access have come from educated feminism and women within other distinctive groups, particularly those differentiated by ethnic origin and colour. In many respects these groups follow the familiar pattern from newsletter through periodical to book publishing. One example among many is the small magazine *Fireweed*, which was started by women who had acquired the necessary credentials to authorise them as publishers.[40] They were university-educated – some in the foreign universities of the United States, which confer even greater credibility than those of Canada. They had gained experience by editing for major commercial publishing houses such as Oxford University Press, or by working on established small magazines in Canada. *Fireweed* emerged into an authorised product through careful tending; it acquired grants and gained access for many writers from 1978 into the Eighties.

Makeda Silvera's introduction to *Fireworks*,[41] which is a selection of essays from *Fireweed*, notes that the aim of the Fireweed Collective was to publish "works by a diversity of women" because "people not of the dominant culture have not had active participation in, or access to, arts journals, whether these have been part of the dominant culture or have emerged from the small presses" (8). But she goes on to say that in earlier issues of *Fireweed* "there were no articles by Native women and that pieces by both immigrant and Canadian-born women of colour were very few in number. Articles addressing the issues of class or by working class women of any colour were also rare" (8). Silvera raises the issue in order to underline the fact that the selection in *Fireworks* will emphasise these areas of omission, and one contribution, "Organising Exclusion," specifically addresses the omissions. The issue is also related to questions of literacy (discussed below). Silvera herself now runs the press SisterVision, which concentrates on publishing writing by women of colour, and has moved to grant-funding from the Canada Council. The quality of production and scale of distribution, visibility for the sisters, and reward, will be substantially extended in the process; and the writers will have far greater ease of access to audience.

The edifice of publishing itself and its complicity in the social fabric is far more difficult to question or shift. When its rules are broken, as they were when

40 Most of the following details were taken from personal interview.

41 Makeda Silvera, ed. *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986).

the Women's Press (which was specifically established to redress the omissions of the traditional publishers and the elisions of gender) decided in 1988 to drop three contributions to a collection of essays at the last minute, there was objection if not outrage. The reason given for dropping the contributions was that they were racist, although discussion of this difficult and embarrassing topic has been submerged under later discussions on the issue of censorship.[42] However, the shock of the experience for those whose contributions were rejected also lies in the fact that an editorial collective had initially accepted their work, proofs of the material had been printed, and publishers conventionally don't pull out at that stage. In this case, editor–writer relationships, guidelines for which have been in place for at least two centuries, were simply overridden. The Women's Press story is further complicated by the context of collective working and the potentially emotive issues arising from its aims of solidarity and political effectiveness. You may change what you publish, widen your net to include other groups/voices/positions, but change of publishing practices, which in a print society often become naturalised into "rights," is shocking even to the most politically and socially flexible of writing groups.

What distinguishes the responses of these women is a deep understanding of literacy: the fact that reading and writing are the gateway to social participation and can create extended and supportive communities.[43] The larger, currently more disadvantaged group of women with regard to publishing access is that of the newly literate or non-literate – the enormous proportion of the female population which does not communicate in the written medium. If literacy is not just technical reading and writing but also the recognition of the importance of writing and reading in forming, engaging with, and participating in communities, then many women are frequently only marginally literate. There are, of course, other ways of participating in broad social activities and other media for cultural communication, but none so central to the mediation of power in a print society.

Literacy

However, one of the primary reasons for a failure to take up literacy to the extent that other marginalised groups have done is that many women do not know how to break out of the circle of marginalisation: If you don't understand your marginalised position or, more importantly, if you perceive it as necessary, you do not

42 Marlene Nourbese Philip, "The Disappearing Debate: Or how the discussion of racism has been taken over by the censorship issue," *This Magazine* 23.2 (July–August, 1989).

43 It is this reasoning that seems to lie behind the West Word and East Word workshops generated by the Women and Words/*Les Femmes et les mots* conference held in Vancouver in July 1983; see *in the feminine* (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1985). The different approaches taken by the various workshops that have since been held needs serious research.

begin to articulate it in any medium and so you remain marginalised. The circle is reduplicated with respect to literacy: if you are not aware of the social possibilities of reading and writing or, again, if you cannot see a way to participating in them, then you do not attempt to use the medium and so you remain non-literate. Breaking the circle is one of the central pursuits of feminism, and much feminist practice has been brought to bear on literacy. On both counts what is needed is consciousness-raising – a painful, lengthy and difficult process for many of us – and support. Given that marginality has been recognised, and that literacy is perceived as a means of addressing its disempowerment, the most urgent problems for this group are often time and money. Most people within this group are working women hard pressed at home, often with children.[44] Few have a readily disposable income that would permit them to enter the publishing world, which is the economic and technological medium through which literacy is currently effected in Canada.

This large group straddles a broad range of socioeconomic strata, and represents the largest single audience for the products of the weekly and monthly commercial periodical market, which have a large after-sales circulation. But while there are many publications produced for this group, there are relatively few printed genres produced by it. Although it is difficult to estimate, the largest genre may be that of the P.T.A. or community newsletter; another important genre is that of the fund-raising recipe book, where women can take the opportunity to share creative variations on changes in food pathways and domestic technology: in other words, what is going into and out of stores selling household products. Other genres that emerge are often related to issues arising out of consciousness-raising groups, such as natural childbirth, domestic violence, child abuse and general social feminist issues. One example here might be *The Midwifery Issue*, from the Midwifery Task Force of Ontario, which throughout the early to mid-Eighties was concerned with creating acceptance for midwifery as a professional body.[45] The newsletter was distributed primarily by mail-order to a membership list, thus reflecting the lack of sales outlets for such special-interest groups. It is interesting that the use of a computer mailing-list was considered highly sophisticated in the mid-Eighties, but by the early Nineties was fairly common among other special-interest group publications. The *Midwifery* newsletter was still firmly part of a pre-desktop-publishing world, and was produced through typed copy and paste-up, unlike many newsletters in 1990 from, for example, the environmental pressure-groups.

44 The pamphlet "Let's Talk About Women and Literacy" from the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women also cites as a major barrier to progress in this area the threat that "men in a learner's life" may feel when she begins to become literate.

45 The group has been quite successful in achieving its aims. Much of this information was gathered for me by Elizabeth Driver, who contributed to the newsletter.

Publications from groups addressing specific issues are often funded by subscription, and in some cases from private donations. If there is no need for a sale, then one of the most important distribution-points is the local library. Groups with more general interest, although dependent upon subscription, do seem to be able to find distribution in some stores. One example here might be the *Northern Women Journal*, costing $1.50 and collectively produced and published in Thunder Bay, which includes not only news and information but also book reviews, poetry, and short prose. Significantly, a more substantial periodical, *The Womanist*, published from Ottawa, was initially free. It noted in a request for voluntary subscriptions that "We are free because we believe that all women, whatever their economic situation, should be able to get news about women [...] By being free we find that we can distribute *The Womanist* to places where women are, such as laundromats, corner stores, and community centres." Nevertheless, they depended upon advertisements and subscriptions to cover costs.

This relatively recent publication is, of course, selective. If the articles which *The Womanist* prints indicate the breadth of its intended readership, then it is clearly addressed to all women of whatever class, colour or religion who wish to discuss and debate issues arising from a consciousness of women's position in Canadian society. But what is then distinctive about the many publishers and publications advertised in the paper is how few come from groups which identify themselves as white working-class or women concerned with working in the home as a community-forming activity.[46] There are advertisements from publishers and bookstores representing lesbian communities, women of colour, Aboriginal women, women of immigrant and visible minorities: part of each of these communities already recognises the need to participate in the social medium of print. There are also advertisements from feminist organisations and research institutes, which produce valuable material analysing the lives of women in terms of problems and policy, and which aim particularly at those people working on or interested in the interface with disadvantaged and non-literate women; but these books do not appear to be written for those women themselves, and are certainly not written by them.

For many women, difficulty of access to communication through print arises because the difficulty is not recognised as such to begin with. Once recognised as a primary means to social participation, there are problems of finance and problems of time: who will look after the children? But this group has another problem that it shares to a greater or lesser extent with all the other groups: that of literacy.

46 These observations are made from issues purchased during the summer and fall of 1989.

It is striking that many of the contributions to an issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* on "Women and Literacy,"[47] discuss precisely several areas of this newly literate group, as well as including many pieces of writing from people who are emerging from it. This issue presents a valuable collection for literacy studies everywhere, containing as it does scholarly research, bibliographies, commentaries on social and political issues, accounts of programmes in context, and a critical look at contemporary practices. The editorial, by Rita Cox and Leslie Sanders, underlines the importance of reading and writing in a literate society where "the written word is the source of authority and power," and where literacy is needed by women "to function in the public sphere in order to provide for themselves and their children" (3). The editors also note that literacy programmes provide the opportunity for women to gather "on their own behalf," to break their frequent isolation and establish community and support. But they end with a warning that literacy without a "challenge to the status quo" simply maintains faulty social structures. An uncritical acquisition of literacy may lead to uncritical participation in society. As Elaine Gaber–Katz and Jenny Horsman argue in "Is it her voice if she speaks their words," teachers of literacy need to develop a "critical pedagogy" (120) that will alert the reader/writer to the social, political and ideological dimensions of literacy practice.

While a critical pedagogy is important, it is difficult simultaneously to achieve practical skills and a critique of that practice: this process takes time. Further, there is the problem of audience – the fact that too strong a critique may produce writing so unconventional as to lose its potential readership. Practical skills are needed to start with, so that at some point, sooner rather than later, criticism may come. It is important to have the choice to be critical. Not to have that choice is, as Carole Boudrais says, "frightening":

> I was illiterate. Being illiterate is the most frightening thing. It's like being in a prison of your own self. It's one of the deepest secrets that you keep hidden inside, out of shame. Not being able to read street names, medical instructions or menus poses a threat to survival. (72)

Certainly, as the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) notes, illiteracy makes it twice as difficult for women to get a job; and when they do, if they have less than a Grade 8 education, they make only 59% of what men earn compared to the 68% average of more literate women (27). Furthermore, not to have that choice is to be fundamentally isolated – from the social information given by a newspaper about films in cinemas or local events, from the communication possible through use of a telephone book, from the work that children bring home from school. Indeed, a number of personal accounts in

47 *Women & Literacy*, special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 9.3–4 (Fall/Winter, 1988).

"Women and Literacy" note that involvement in a literacy programme began when the woman concerned went to a parent–teacher meeting to discuss her child's work and revealed that she could neither read nor write.

Over the last twenty years literacy programmes have begun to flourish all over Canada, from county and metropolitan councils, from public libraries, from community groups, from colleges, and from pressure groups for the disabled, for recent immigrants, for prison inmates. "Women and Literacy" raises the question of access for a large number of groups, surprisingly omitting the particular problems of the older generations, the senior citizens who suffer from many of the same disadvantages. Less surprising is the omission of the difficult area of children's rights to access, but the collection does point the way back to the problems of access to publishing once literacy has begun for the general community of the newly literate. Literacy programmes will not only provide a way to break the isolation by physically locating people with a common problem in one place where they can weave communities, but, with a critical pedagogy, those communities can also move on to write about their focusing issues and produce material that can be read by others – extending their community by publication and broadening their social participation. What can be difficult at this stage for these groups is entry into the world of publishing. What is usually more difficult is for their writing to find and/or generate appropriate readings – in other words, for some communication to be effected.

Publishing, as indicated earlier, is a high-risk capital venture. To minimise risk, publishers and their editors, who act as ideological censors, produce writing that is acceptable to and desired by as large a market/audience as possible – a majority language, an unthreatening cultural perspective, conventional literary genres. Were publishers the only factor, written culture would have stagnated many centuries ago. It has always been the role of the patron – private or state, and sometimes publisher *as* patron – to support the cultural explorations which effect change. The grant-giving bodies in Canada act in just such a role, but they do apply criteria of evaluation which are rooted in the intensely literate traditions of most of both the early and later immigrant populations. For newly literate writers and readers, there is rarely immediate commercial interest, and there are few sources of financial support.

The writings reproduced in "Women and Literacy" such as "My name is Rose" by Rose Doiron and "My Story" by Olive Bernard are funded by literacy programmes – indirectly, rather than directly by the government. There is no conventional sales and marketing infrastructure for the products, presumably because the audience is perceived to be low-income. The writing does receive some circulation within literacy programmes themselves, but there is little access to engagement with a wider audience. Unlike all the other groups, which get a

helping government hand to make the step from newsletter/paper to small publisher, this group receives at best low-level indirect sponsorship. Certainly, the writing that is produced is not authorised as "literature."

The Canadian government at federal and provincial level has, over the last thirty years, been encouraging in a number of ways both to literacy programmes and to publishing circles. For, whatever benefits to the state might have accrued, it has at the very least enabled people to choose to participate in society through the medium of print. For a number of overtly cultural reasons, however, the government remains unaware of the possibilities that are opened up by the writings of newly literate groups, and needs to address this oversight. One of the more tragic results of the economic crisis in Ontario has been the radical reduction in literacy and oral-history programmes since 1991. Unlike some communities with marginal access to print, which continue to be supported, the community of non-literate women appears to be being forgotten.[48]

Groups with difficulty of access to written communication have a variety of problems. Those portrayed here relate specifically to the production and consumption of publishing, and to literacy as the recognition of the value of communicating through reading/writing. Canada as a whole is addressing many of these areas, and one result has been an explosion of writings over the last twenty years, which has begun to open up new strategies for social discourse. We must hope that more attention will be paid to the breaks in the literacy-publishing connection and that the new technologies for producing written material[49] will bridge and enable rather than obstruct the possibilities for the formation of communities and their social participation.

48 For example, the "Storylinks" project in Toronto organised by Mary Breen is suffering substantial cutbacks.

49 For example, the Swift Current experiments of Frank Davey and Fred Wah, which use computer networking technology to provide a forum for writers. Davey's wish to drive a wedge between the capitalist basis of print technology and the medium of writing outlined in *The SwiftCurrent Anthology* (Toronto: Coach House, 1988) could easily backfire. While Swift Current II in particular gives evidence of a new and potentially far more broadly based technology for writing, it also indicates a potential for different modes of writing, especially the non-linear, and for new ways of establishing social groupings by way of writing.

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