

## **Newspapers, Magazines and Journalism in Canada: Towards a Critical Historiography**

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[See table of contents](#)

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Newspapers, Magazines and Journalism in Canada:  
Towards a Critical Historiography

PRINT MEDIA AND JOURNALISM in Canada — until relatively recently — have largely escaped academic attention; books on the subject have been written primarily by former newspaper editors and journalists. As Paul Rutherford observed in *Acadiensis* 16 years ago, “books about the media written by journalists have a bit of an unsavory reputation in academic circles [in that] the journalist is thought to be an unregenerate story-teller who feels a need to excite his audience with a lot of colourful anecdotes and easy generalizations”.<sup>1</sup> If the books under consideration here are any indication, there has been an identifiable shift in recent years towards a more analytical treatment of the print media. To be sure, books about newspapers and magazines still tend to be written by those who are, or who have been, active journalists. But there is an increasing tendency to move away from anecdotes and colourful reportage towards explanation and interpretation, providing, in the words of Rutherford, “insights into the world of news and its recent history”.<sup>2</sup>

Despite differences in approaches and subject matter, the works reviewed here share a commitment to historical narrative; they seek to provide a chronological account of past events with a view to shedding light on some aspect of the emergence and development of the print media in Canada. As contributions to historical scholarship this recent work can be clustered in five groups: historical overviews, first-person accounts, biographies, accounts of particular newspapers or institutions, and focused thematic studies.

Unlike the United States where the print media have long been the object of general historical treatment, Canada has been slow to produce credible surveys of the development of newspapers, journalism and magazines.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the few works of this kind that were written dealt with the institutions and practices of print media only indirectly, a tendency that can be attributed to their overtly partisan nature. A text published in 1908 by a Committee of the Canadian Press Association (CPA), while bearing the title *A History of Canadian Journalism*, dealt with its subject matter in only a cursory manner; the bulk of the book was taken up with a “sketch” of the CPA

1 Paul Rutherford, “Making the News”, *Acadiensis*, XII, 1 (Autumn 1982), p. 136.

2 Rutherford, “Making the News”, p. 136.

3 See, for instance, Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America* ([1810] New York, 1970); Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872* (New York, 1873); Willard G. Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927); Alfred M. Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York, 1937); Frank L. Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York, 1941).

(written by A. H. U. Colquhoun) from its founding in 1859 to 1908.<sup>4</sup> In *A History of Canadian Journalism II*, published on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CPA, W. A. Craick picks up the story from where the first volume, written on the 50th anniversary, left off. He describes the final years of the association and the transformation, in 1919, of a branch of it into the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association, which endures today as part of the Canadian Newspaper Association.<sup>5</sup> Partisanship of a different sort informed Aegidius Fauteux's survey of printing in Canada published in 1930.<sup>6</sup> Commissioned and paid for by the Rolland Paper Company in Montreal, the principal aim of the work was to chronicle the contribution printing made to social and economic progress in Canada. As such, it focused primarily on how leading entrepreneurs deployed printing as part of their operations. Little was actually said about the meaning and significance of the products and institutions of printing. M. E. Nichols continued this tradition of partisan history with his account of the development of The Canadian Press, written in 1948.<sup>7</sup> While the book was valuable as an overview of this important news-gathering institution, the avowed aim of the author (who served as president of The Canadian Press from 1931 to 1933) — to provide The Canadian Press with some badly needed "advertising" (p. 1) — made an objective or critical account of the organization all but impossible. While works of this kind shed light on some aspects of the development of the print media in Canada, their intent was largely to carve out a place in history for one or another interest or organization. As such, their contributions to a general understanding of the development of journalism and newspapers in Canada have been limited.

W. H. Kesterton's pioneering survey of the development of newspapers in Canada represented a major departure from earlier studies.<sup>8</sup> The work was impressive as a ground-breaking chronicle and an inventory, and it has rightfully come to serve as a starting point for further research.<sup>9</sup> It offers little analysis, however, of how the press developed and changed. Instead, Kesterton uses what Thomas Walkom calls "an extended asparagus metaphor" of transplant (1752-1807), thickening (1807-58), western transplant (1858-1900), and modern period (1900-67).<sup>10</sup> While Kesterton's work was comprehensive, his historiographical approach was functionalist in nature,

4 *A History of Canadian Journalism in the Several Portions of the Dominion with a Sketch of the Canadian Press Association, 1859-1908* (Toronto, 1908). The CPA was an organization of editors and publishers of newspapers and other periodicals. Though members of the association occasionally worked together on issues such as postal rates and newsprint costs, its chief purpose appears to have been social, an attempt to bring together people who shared a common profession, if not a common political point of view.

5 W. A. Craick, *A History of Canadian Journalism II* (Toronto, 1959).

6 Aegidius Fauteux, *The Introduction of Printing into Canada: A Brief Survey*. (Montreal, 1930).

7 M. E. Nichols, (CP): *The Story of The Canadian Press* (Toronto, 1948).

8 *History of Journalism in Canada* (Ottawa, 1967). Although the book was published in Canada's centennial year, Kesterton began to work on it in 1948, in conjunction with a course he was teaching on the "history of newspapers" in the journalism department at Carleton University.

9 A more concise and up-to-date statement of his historical periodization can be found in Wilfred Kesterton and Roger Bird, "The Press in Canada: A Historical Overview", in Benjamin Singer, ed., *Communications in Canadian Society*, 4th ed., (Toronto, 1995).

10 Thomas L. Walkom, "The Daily Newspaper Industry in Ontario's Developing Capitalistic Economy: Toronto and Ottawa, 1871-1911", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1983, p. 4.

with his assumption that the “free press” has been necessary to the unfolding of democracy. This teleological standpoint prevented him from examining newspapers on their own terms, and from exploring (rather than assuming) the extent to which they were bearers of freedom and democracy. Bertha Bassam covers some of the same ground as Kesterton in a monograph that recounts the founding of the first printing press and newspaper in each province.<sup>11</sup> Although both works contain elusive information about the early days of printing in Canada, they provide little in the way of theoretical or interpretive guidance.<sup>12</sup>

The survey tradition established by Bassam and Kesterton has been carried on by two more recent works that provide general historical overviews of the development of the print media in Canada: Fraser Sutherland’s *The Monthly Epic: A History of Canadian Magazines, 1789-1989* (Markham, Ont., Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989) and Douglas Fetherling’s *Rise of the Canadian Newspaper* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1990). As is inevitable in a work that seeks to cover 200 years of magazine history in 300 pages, *The Monthly Epic* has some glaring omissions, virtually ignoring, for instance, the French magazine press. And it pays perhaps too much attention to standard works such as *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night*. Sutherland’s periodization, like that of Kesterton, is not particularly convincing. His “era of edification” in essence extends from the Victorian age to the verge of the Second World War. His “mass” period is enormous, ranging from before the First World War to the 1960s, and encompassing publications as different as *Time Canada* and *Canadian Forum*. Although he is comfortable with the idea that the magazine underwent a transition from “class” to “mass”, he does not appear to know how to handle the recent shift to the specialty market. Is this a resurgence of a “class” market, or an entirely new form?

In addition, his insistence on organizing his work according to this periodization scheme leaves him with an organizational quandary: how to handle the larger, contextual issues in the magazine press, especially the threat to the domestic magazine from the large U.S. magazine market. His approach is to shoehorn some of the material concerning U.S. competition into the opening pages of each section. As a result his discussion of the single most enduring characteristic of the English-

11 Bertha Bassam, *The First Printers and Newspapers in Canada* Monograph Series in Librarianship, No. 1, (Toronto, 1968).

12 It is striking that around the same time that Kesterton and Bassam produced their surveys of the history of journalism in Canada, André Beaulieu and Jean Hamelin were beginning to undertake the same venture with reference to Quebec, “Aperçu du journalisme québécois d’expression française”, *Recherches Sociographiques* 7 (septembre-décembre 1966), pp. 305-48. This represented the point of departure for a ten-volume series covering the period 1764-1975, André Beaulieu and Jean Hamelin et al., *La presse québécoise des origines à nos jours* (Québec, 1973-90). Arguably, the publication of this monumental series has served to put Quebec newspaper history scholarship on much firmer foundations than its English-Canadian counterpart. That such a series could itself appear is testimony to the reverence commonly accorded by francophone Québécois to their newspapers and journalists. Recent evidence of this tendency includes a series on the lives of journalists, *Vocation: Journaliste* broadcast on le réseau d’information (RDI), and publication of Hélène Pelletier’s massive and comprehensive *Olivar Asselin et son temps: Le Militant* (Montreal, 1996). This volume is the first of a projected series on the Quebec journalist’s life and times. (We would like to have included it in the review but came upon it too late).

Canadian magazine business — an awareness of the U.S. “problem”, addressed by a range of relatively ineffective “solutions” over the last 100 years — is disjointed, inconsistent and attenuated.<sup>13</sup> Sutherland also assumes, as a matter of course, that magazines must have advertisers,<sup>14</sup> and he fails to examine how this reliance has affected the content of Canadian magazines and shaped their handling of critical public issues. He gives inordinate attention to magazine entrepreneurs and the elite corps of writers and little attention to the complex division of labour which makes the production of magazines possible.

Fetherling’s survey, *Rise of the Canadian Newspaper*, though much briefer (130 pages) than Sutherland’s account, is in its own way much more comprehensive. It not only gives a good deal of attention to the francophone press, but it also examines the development of newspapers in small-town and rural Canada, as well as in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and in urban English Canada. However, it suffers from problems of periodization similar to those that beset Kesterton and Sutherland. Fetherling’s characterization of the current epoch in newspapers lacks both precision and clarity, and fits rather uneasily within the broader scheme he has developed. His accounts of the colourful and heroic individuals populating Canadian newspaper history make for entertaining reading, but the book lacks an overall argument or set of claims; there is little more than a barebones description of a succession of newspapers parading across time.

Such general histories or surveys are of some value, particularly in identifying and cataloguing an impressive range of publications that appeared, many of them very briefly, in this country. They are also useful in identifying some of the key figures in the history of Canadian journalism. But these books tell us little about the political, social and cultural contexts in which the publications were embedded. And they tell us even less about what impact they might have had on the lives of the people who read them. For the most part, the general histories are highly anecdotal in nature, with little attention given to how print media and journals were implicated in broader developments. Their focus has primarily been on the powerful and influential founders, publishers and editors of newspapers and magazines, to the neglect of the broad mass of newswriters.

The bias towards elites in general histories of newspapers and magazines is mirrored in first-person accounts, which have long been a staple of print media historiography. Memoirs such as those of Hector Charlesworth,<sup>15</sup> Sir John S. Willison<sup>16</sup> and P. D. Ross,<sup>17</sup> while long on impressions of particular persons and

13 For a more coherent account of how Canadian publishers and government officials have tried to identify and address the issue, see Isaiah Litvak and Christopher Maule, *Cultural Sovereignty: The Time and Reader’s Digest Case in Canada* (New York, 1974).

14 That this is not necessarily the case is evident in Ms. magazine’s decision to eliminate advertising altogether. The editorial board felt that carrying advertisements compromised the content of the magazine, in that certain approaches and topics were avoided in order to please advertisers. The model the board adopted was that of the subscribers supporting the magazine entirely through increased rates. See Mary Thom, *Inside Ms: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York, 1997).

15 Hector Charlesworth, *Candid Chronicles: Leaves from the Note Book of a Canadian Journalist* (Toronto, 1925).

16 Sir John S. Willison, *Reminiscences Personal and Political* (Toronto, 1919).

17 P. D. Ross, *Retrospects of a Newspaper Person* (Toronto, 1931).

episodes, have much less to say about how newspapers actually worked. Although it is possible to infer a good deal about the journalism culture of the day from the commentary, these memoirs rarely address either newspaper institutions or practices.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in their efforts to simply tell their stories, writers of first-person accounts habitually eschew notes, references, and the use of other sources.<sup>19</sup> This makes passing judgement on the veracity of their accounts a perilous task, as their own memories are their primary source (abetted sometimes by personal papers). It is difficult for the reader to assess the value of these recollections.

Richard Doyle's reflections on the period he spent at the *Globe and Mail*, *Hurly-Burly: A Time at the Globe* (Toronto, MacMillan, 1990) while consistent with the earlier pattern of memoirs, departs from this sub-genre in a number of respects. His book combines an overview of the history of the newspaper — from its founding by George Brown as *The Globe* in 1844 — with an account of his own involvement. After coming to the newspaper as a copy boy in 1951, Doyle rose through the ranks, becoming managing editor in 1959, and editor-in-chief in 1963, a position he held until 1983 when he became editor emeritus. The historical prelude to his memoir is not out of place, given the sense of tradition, belonging and identity that seems to pervade the *Globe*. But readers would have been better served had Doyle's historical narrative been less rambling, with more attention to the newspaper's overall pattern of development. In this respect, Doyle's commentary on his own experience at the *Globe* is much more insightful, possibly because it was based on direct observations.

The book's chapters are organized around the events that occurred during particular blocks of time, although the time span in question is not always clear. It may be that Doyle's elliptical and kaleidoscopic style is the most appropriate way of conveying the hectic and helter-skelter nature of newspaper work. And in recalling particular events, Doyle makes no effort to bend past perceptions to suit contemporary mores. While this approach is almost calculated to offend contemporary sensibilities, it does provide a graphic sense of the point of view shared by Doyle and some of his *Globe* colleagues.<sup>20</sup> All the same, Doyle falls into the all-too-common trap in memoir-writing, as he refuses to reflect critically on his own actions, or to give credence to oppositional views. This emerges in a somewhat self-serving tone, particularly in his reflections on labour issues, such as in his gloating account of how he and other members of the *Globe and Mail's* managerial corps engaged

18 In this regard, there are no classic newspaper memoirs that approach those of H. L. Mencken's *Newspaper Days, 1899-1906* (New York: 1941) or A. J. Liebling's *The Press* (New York, 1961). Nor are there first-person recollections about Canadian print media that can match Robert Darnton's perceptive observations in "Writing News and Telling Stories", *Daedalus*, (Spring 1975), pp. 175-93. Nevertheless, some insights into the cultures and practices of Canadian newspapers are provided by the short memoirs collected in Walter Stewart, ed., *Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story* (Edmonton, 1980).

19 See, for instance, Wilfrid Eggleston, *While I Still Remember: A Personal Record* (Toronto, 1968); Hugh Garner, *One Damn Thing After Another* (Toronto, 1973) and Grattan O'Leary, *Recollections of People, Press, and Politics* (Toronto, 1977).

20 For instance, reflecting on developments in Yorkville during the 1960s, he writes that "the hippies took their time thinking, acquiring their love beads and, perhaps, in poetic moments, plaiting love knots in their long black hair. They crowded the coffee houses listening to Murray McLauchlan, Ian and Sylvia, Neil Young, and other young ne'er-do-wells like them, sing their tribal songs" (p. 231).



enthusiastically in strike-breaking activities (p. 206). Putting his own actions in the best possible light also means treading lightly on aspects of his career at the *Globe and Mail* that have been subject to some criticism.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the book is full of sharp insights into how the *Globe and Mail* worked as an institution. Doyle frequently takes a pause from recounting issues and events to shed light on particular facets of the *Globe's* organizational practices. For instance, after offering a clear and highly nuanced account of the division of labour in the editorial office, he explains how meetings of the editorial board were typically conducted (pp. 188-9). He also is a master at unravelling a complex series of events and making circuitous transactions intelligible. Despite its unwieldy structure and obvious biases, *Hurly-Burly* provides revealing glimpses of the day-to-day operations of the *Globe* during a particularly turbulent period in its history. And with its effort to provide an historically grounded account and to capture the texture of newspaper life with detail and nuance, it marks a shift in direction away from conventional memoirs.

Victor Malarek's narrative of his life as an "investigative journalist", *Gut Instinct: The Making of an Investigative Journalist* (Toronto, Macmillan Canada, 1996), offers a refreshing departure from the genre of first-person accounts in terms of the perspective it provides. While other journalists and reporters have told their stories — often with much wit and insight<sup>22</sup> — they have not laid claim to shed light on how this particular kind of journalism is practised.<sup>23</sup> Mirroring the kind of reporting that he came to embrace, Malarek writes in a passionate and emotionally-charged style that might be described as a form of "journalisme-verité". Rather than writing a traditional memoir, Malarek has chosen to tell the "stories *behind* the stories I wrote during my days as a newspaper reporter" (p. xiii [emphasis in original]). Nevertheless, he does provide a sketch of his career path from a "lowly, underpaid, unappreciated copyboy" at the Montreal-based *Weekend* magazine in 1968, to his stint as senior reporter (specializing in investigative reporting) with the *Globe and Mail* (1976-90).<sup>24</sup>

While his account proceeds in a chronological manner, Malarek does not cover the various stages of his career in equal measure; its focus is on particular stories that he covered during his years as a newspaper reporter. They seem to have been chosen as much for their suspense and intrigue as for what they reveal about the practice of investigative journalism. At points he describes how stunning breakthroughs turned the tide for a particular investigation, thereby shifting the balance of credibility from the investigated to the investigator. His presentation, however, does not give sufficient attention to the many hum-drum valleys of dry investigative leads that surely must have been interspersed among the towering peaks of reportage that Malarek

21 For some of the problems with Doyle's job performance during the final years of his editorship see David Hayes, *Power and Influence: The Globe and Mail and the News Revolution* (Toronto, 1992), p. 185.

22 See, for instance, Bruce Hutchison, *The Far Side of the Street* (Toronto, 1976) and Robert Fulford, *The Best Seat in the House* (Toronto, 1988).

23 Pierre Berton's memoir, *Starting Out, 1920-1947* (Toronto, 1987), while not explicitly dwelling on investigative journalism per se, reveals how a probing reporter practised his trade in the days before this kind of endeavour gained recognition.

24 He previously wrote about his early days in *Hey Malarek!: The True Story of a Street Kid Who Made It* (Toronto, 1984).

chronicles. To be sure, he does provide some indication of how stories deserving a more thorough investigation fell on deaf ears and were never adequately covered.<sup>25</sup> Overall, his detailed and crisply written vignettes provide a very real sense of how Malarek practised his trade, including his cultivation of sources and his negotiations with editors in undertaking assignments and preparing stories. With respect to the latter, it is somewhat surprising that Malarek sheds little light on the overall place of investigative reporting at the *Globe and Mail*. Given that other investigative journalists (such as Linda McQuaig) ran into difficulties during the same period, one might expect Malarek to have experienced similar conflicts.

Malarek won the Michener award for public-service reporting in 1988 (ironically, for his investigation of financial and legal irregularities at Lang-Michener, the law firm that Roland Michener co-founded). In light of his success as a journalist at the *Globe and Mail*, and the obvious enjoyment that he derived from his work, it is perplexing that Malarek offers no explanation whatsoever for his leaving the paper in July 1990 to take up a position at CBC's *Fifth Estate*. There is also a bit of a disjunction between his chapters on investigative reporting and those on his occasional foreign assignments for the *Globe and Mail*. While the accounts of his experiences in Iran (during the Revolution of 1980) and the Horn of Africa (covering the refugee crisis in 1987) are both moving and hair-raising, they do not address the impact and significance of his reportage. Had Malarek brought these parts of the book more in line with the other episodes he discusses, his description of an investigative reporter's life would have been significantly enhanced.

Despite their limitations, the books of Malarek and Doyle indicate some new directions for first-person accounts. Doyle situates his memoir within the history of the *Globe and Mail*, providing a fine-grained portrait of its collective life from the standpoint of an insider. Malarek, by contrast, by carefully chronicling some of his own experiences, reveals much about how investigative journalism might be generally practised. These books demonstrate that memoirs can successfully bring personal experience and print-media practices into focus simultaneously.

All things considered, biographies of journalists, especially those done by historians, tend to offer more enduring insights into newspaper history. Nevertheless, as is the case with autobiographies, biographies are sometimes confounded by their subjects. Biographies of journalists (or newspaper proprietors) are particularly difficult since so many of these people devote only part of their working life to the news business.<sup>26</sup> Up until about a decade ago, biographers in the field faced this difficulty continually, as they largely confined themselves to telling the stories of the

25 One of the most striking in this category was a story that Malarek wrote about Jean Chretien's wife Aline being put on the payroll for a law firm (Lang-Michener). Jean Chretien worked as a consultant for this firm after his unsuccessful bid for the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1984. Given that Aline was paid \$15,000 a year by the company for more than two years, but supposedly worked at home directly for her husband, Malarek alleged that this constituted tax evasion through "income-splitting" (pp. 208-11).

26 For example, Susan Goldenberg's *The Thomson Empire* (Toronto, 1984) reveals a lot more about Lord Thomson of Fleet, international press baron, conglomerate chief and investor in North Sea oil, than about Roy Thomson, builder of the biggest chain of small newspapers in Canada, and what that meant for Canadian journalism and for Canadian society.



dominating polyvalent figures in Canadian journalism such as Joseph Howe,<sup>27</sup> Joseph Flavelle<sup>28</sup> and John W. Dafoe.<sup>29</sup> While each of these biographies offered valuable insights, taken collectively, they provided the strong impression that one could understand the history of Canadian journalism simply by examining the careers of those with established reputations as titans of the field. While this tendency is apparent in the books under consideration here, one can also detect a trend towards writing about figures in print media who have made important contributions, but have hitherto been ignored.<sup>30</sup>

Michael Nolan's *Walter J. Blackburn: A Man for All Media* (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1989) falls squarely into this category. Blackburn was a grandson of Josiah Blackburn, who had founded *The London Free Press and Daily Western Advertiser* in 1855. He succeeded his father as owner and publisher of the *Free Press* in 1935 at the tender age of 21. He used the newspaper as the basis for building a small media empire based in southwestern Ontario; his multi-media interests eventually included a radio station, a television station and a cluster of weekly publications. After providing a brief account of the family history, Nolan traces his life and multi-media career. A concluding chapter charts the course of the "fourth generation" in the immediate aftermath of Blackburn's death in 1984. The book is thoroughly and meticulously researched, drawing extensively on interviews, archival holdings and business records of the various Blackburn companies. In all likelihood, Nolan was able to gain access to such material because he had been commissioned by the Blackburn family to write the authorized biography "as a tribute, and an objective evaluation of Walter Blackburn and his career as a media owner" (p. xii).

Although the book largely succeeds in highlighting Blackburn's accomplishments, it does so at the expense of close scrutiny of the rationale behind his actions. For instance, Nolan at several points describes Blackburn's virulent anti-union sentiments, and reveals the "noblesse oblige" reasoning that led him to form a company union — The London Free Press Employees Benefits Society — during the war years (p.34). Nolan neither elaborates on his remark that such an initiative was "self-serving", nor presents in any detail the case for unionization made by Blackburn's employees. Such an approach is characteristic of the book as a whole; Blackburn's views on various subjects are carefully presented while dissenting views are virtually absent. Had the author made more of an effort to balance Blackburn's omnipresent perspective with material calling his views into question, the work would have better attained the "objectivity" to which it aspired. But then again, a book of this kind might never have been "authorized" had it offered a more muted and less fulsome tribute than the Blackburn family desired.

David Mackenzie's *Arthur Irwin: A Biography* (Toronto, University of Toronto

27 J. M. Beck, *Joseph Howe*, 2 vols. (Kingston and Montreal, 1982-3).

28 Michael Bliss, *A Canadian Millionaire: The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle, 1859-1939* (Toronto, 1978).

29 Ramsay Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* (Toronto, 1963).

30 Perhaps in recognition of this oversight, the journal *Content* during the 1970s routinely featured short biographies of key figures in the history of Canadian journalism. A number of these were reprinted in Barrie Zwicker and Dick MacDonald, eds., *The News: Inside the Canadian Media* (Ottawa, 1982).

Press, 1993) has as its subject another figure who has loomed large in the history of Canadian print media, yet who had not previously been the object of a full-scale study.<sup>31</sup> In charting Irwin's life and times, Mackenzie has drawn extensively on archival material, interviews, and on Irwin's personal papers (now available in the National Archives) to which he was given access. While he obviously admires and respects Irwin, he largely avoids the hagiographic tendencies so evident in Nolan's biography of Walter Blackburn. Unlike Nolan's study, Mackenzie's biography of Irwin does not almost exclusively present the views of its subject when recounting events; particular incidents are described from a more detached and general standpoint, which, while taking into account Irwin's perspective, does not place it at the center of the narrative. Indeed, Irwin disappears entirely from the discussion from time to time, at which point Mackenzie offers deft accounts of particular institutions or episodes, such as the make-up of the Ottawa Press Gallery in the 1920s, the workings of *Maclean's* magazine or the "Bren Gun scandal" that erupted prior to the Second World War. Such an approach allows the author not only to effectively contextualize Irwin's involvement in various incidents, but to present a balanced and even-handed rendering of his activities. Nevertheless, a number of episodes are dealt with in too perfunctory a manner. Given the attention he had previously given to the tension and rivalry between Irwin and long-time *Maclean's* editor Napier Moore, he might have said more about Irwin's succeeding Moore in 1945. Similarly, he fails to fully confront *Maclean's*'s steadfast anti-communism under Irwin's direction, and how this orientation figured in his appointment as director of the National Film Board (with the understanding that he would find and remove the network of "Communists" that the NFB supposedly harboured).

Mackenzie is able nonetheless to provide a very revealing and insightful account of Irwin in relation to his context, convincingly demonstrating how Irwin was a member of the generation of intellectuals who were shaped by their experience of the First World War. The extent to which, under Irwin's direction, *Maclean's* became something like a popular social-science journal, with an emphasis upon research and factually based analysis, is striking. Mackenzie's perceptive accounts of Irwin's editorial practice reveal a great deal about the process by which articles were chosen, written and eventually published. He is convincing in his claim that Irwin exerted an enormous influence on a generation of Canadian writers (such as Pierre Berton, Blair Fraser, Ralph Allen, and Scott Young) who cut their journalistic teeth at *Maclean's* under his editorial tutelage. More generally, Mackenzie uses his biography of Irwin as a point of reference for analyzing the struggles of the Canadian magazine industry — and of *Maclean's* in particular — in the first half of this century.

A number of other biographies examine journalists whose careers were more chequered and distant from executive power than those of Blackburn and Irwin.<sup>32</sup>

31 Irwin's 100th birthday, celebrated earlier this year, was the occasion for an insightful portrait of his life and career. Robert Fulford, "Irwin assembled a nation's dream at Macleans", *Globe and Mail*, 23 May, 1998, pp. C1, C8.

32 One of the first of these efforts was Susan Crean's *Newsworthy: The Lives of Canadian Media Women* (Toronto, 1985). It uses a series of short biographies and interviews to provide a collective portrait of prominent media women in Canada. Unfortunately, Crean does not offer any explanation as to why it is important to do so. Moreover, she provides no overview of the role women play in Canadian

Carman Cumming's *Secret Craft: The Journalism of Edward Farrer* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992) provides a rich and scrupulously researched account of the life of Farrer, who established a reputation as one of the most brilliant and controversial figures Canadian journalism has produced. Yet, as Cumming points out, aside from abundant testimonials from his contemporaries, he has been all but forgotten. It was, in part, this desire to give Farrer his proper due as a dominant figure in Canadian journalism history that moved Cumming to undertake the study. This proved to be a daunting task, as documentation on Farrer's life is fragmentary and uneven at best and many aspects of his career will likely remain shrouded in mystery. For instance, despite his diligent efforts to trace Farrer's past (in Ireland and in Italy) prior to his coming to Canada around 1870, Cumming was able to do little more than call into question the accuracy of accounts of Farrer's early life provided by his contemporaries. But by delving into a variety of personal paper collections and by tracking down a good deal of what Farrer wrote (made all the more difficult because much of what he published was unsigned), Cumming has succeeded admirably in bringing Farrer and his journalistic practice to life.

Moreover, in illuminating Farrer's career as a journalist and influential editorial writer, Cumming's study also reveals a good deal about the institutions and texture of the newspaper world in which he lived and worked. As a foreshadow of what Farrer would experience, Cumming notes that "the Toronto journalistic world that Ned Farrer entered in 1870 ... [was] a bizarre blend of bombast and manipulation and chicanery...it is hard to imagine a young man entering a more fertile ground for cynicism" (p. 34). Cumming quite skilfully shows how Farrer made his way through this world, and how his career fortunes were indelibly bound up with the transformation of the late 19th-century "party" press into the "corporate" press emergent in the early years of the 20th century. In this respect, Farrer's career makes a fascinating case study; as perhaps the most influential practitioner of the partisan editorial, his work was at the centre of 19th-century political conflict and intrigue. Cumming effectively uses the so-called "pamphlet scandal" of 1891<sup>33</sup> as a leitmotif for both establishing Farrer's political notoriety and for setting the stage for a probing discussion of his gradual demise. As Cumming reveals, Farrer's migration from the centre to the periphery of political influence mirrored the gradual abandonment by Canadian newspapers of the sharply partisan stances they had formerly embraced. This absorbing study obliges us to ask: Given that Farrer was acclaimed as one of the most significant and influential journalists of his day, why has he been so thoroughly ignored?

The same could be asked of the subject of Jill Downie's popular biography of a pioneering 19th-century woman journalist, Faith Fenton, *A Passionate Pen: The Life and Times of Faith Fenton* (Toronto, HarperCollins, 1996). Downie relates an

journalism, offering neither employment statistics nor salary comparisons. But that does not stop her from concluding that "women journalists today have each other's company, and there is uncommon strength, daring and delight in those numbers" (p. 27).

- 33 In the 1891 election campaign (which would prove to be his last) John A. Macdonald identified Farrer as the author of a secret pamphlet that advised the United States government on how Canada could be annexed. This accusation, with its appeal to the nationalist sentiments of the electorate, may very well have contributed to the decisive Tory victory in the election. Whether or not Farrer actually wrote the pamphlet remains murky.

engaging tale that slips at times into romanticism. There is no doubt that Fenton/Freeman led an unconventional and interesting life<sup>34</sup> and Downie does a solid job of capturing some of its highlights, especially given that she had relatively little to work with beyond the newspaper record and a few letters. The chapters detailing Fenton's relationship with Lady Aberdeen and her remarkable trip to the north are especially strong. Downie's prose reads as though she has fallen in love with her subject — or at least, is determined to make her readers do so. It positively gushes at times, such as in her description of a vice-regal costume ball in 1896, which Fenton attended in Mennonite costume (p. 2). Given that this work was written for a popular audience, Downie's colourful writing works, though scholars may have difficulty with Downie's tendency to fill gaps in the story with conjecture, particularly about Fenton's feelings.<sup>35</sup>

Downie's attempts to explain the contradictions and complexities of Fenton's life are not entirely convincing. She borrows a device well-known to fans of super hero comic books: the idea of a secret identity or double life. (Mild-mannered school teacher Alice by day; intrepid reporter Faith by night.) Had Fenton been the only woman journalist of her era to live under two names, this explanation would be more persuasive. But the use of pseudonyms was common practice for Victorian journalists, men as well as women. So was the practice of concealing private life even when writing what purported to be personal anecdotes.

In *Kit's Kingdom: The Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman* (Ottawa, Carleton University Press, 1989), Barbara M. Freeman points out that 19th-century women journalists created public personas for a number of reasons, including the need to protect privacy and to satisfy the expectations of their editors and their readers. Coleman, it appears, had more to hide than Faith Fenton — and also enjoyed a higher profile career.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Fenton, who felt it was her duty to publicize activities in the women's movement of the late 19th century, Kit was a late convert to the cause of women's suffrage. Freeman suggests Kit knew that suffrage was not favoured by her

34 Fenton (born Alice Freeman in Bowmanville, Ontario) taught in Toronto schools for almost 20 years. She began writing for newspapers when she was in her late 20s, appearing under the byline "Stella" in the *Northern Advance* in the mid-1880s. In 1888, under the byline "Faith Fenton", she began to work for the *Empire* newspaper as editor of the Women's Empire column, a position she held until losing her job when the *Empire* merged with the *Mail* in 1895. For six years, she had juggled her day job as a teacher and her night job as a journalist, eventually resigning from teaching in 1894. She subsequently ran the *Canadian Home Journal* until her sudden departure in 1897 — apparently provoked in part by the publisher's dissatisfaction with the amount of space she had been giving Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, the wife of the Governor General and a woman Fenton admired. A year later, she headed to the Klondike where she married a doctor and worked for a few years as a freelance correspondent for the *Globe*. The couple eventually returned to Toronto. There Fenton's writing career trailed off.

35 For example, by writing "Who can doubt Faith Fenton cried herself to sleep that terrible night when her editorship of the *Canadian Home Journal* was terminated" (p. 216), Downie leads the reader to conclude that tears were the only appropriate reaction to this traumatic event. But we do not know for a fact that she cried herself to sleep.

36 Born Catherine Ferguson in Ireland, she became Kathleen Willis when she married a well-off, middle-aged merchant, Thomas Willis. She was left penniless when he died — apparently after a drunken fall from a horse — and came to Canada to seek her fortune. She married E. J. Watkins and

editors. But she uncovers some genuine inconsistency in Kit's views, attributing this to personal reasons as well as political ones. As Freeman notes, "She believes women are equally as intelligent as men but are not knowledgeable enough to vote. She declares herself in favour of equal pay for equal work but accepts on authority the denigrating remarks a male boss makes about his female workers" (p. 168). And while Kit felt women could travel widely and adventure freely, her columns emphasized that real happiness hinges on marriage and motherhood. Freeman's scholarly biography of Coleman offers a nice counterpoint to Downie's popular biography of Fenton. The subjects of both books worked in a similar milieu, and knew (and apparently respected) each other. While Downie's is a more wide-ranging, romantic and intimate tale, Freeman's is more carefully framed and presented. Reading the two together enriches each.

Michèle Martin's *Victor Barbeau: Pionnier de la critique culturelle journalistique* (Québec, Presses de l'université Laval, 1997), rather than exploring the life and career of its subject tout court, examines his groundbreaking contributions to the writing of cultural reviews in newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>37</sup> To this end, Martin has drawn extensively on Barbeau's columns in various newspapers over a long time-span to derive insights into the kind of cultural analysis and criticism that Barbeau provided. Her analysis draws from the thought of Antonio Gramsci, Benedict Anderson and Derek Sayers, among others, and examines how the "power/knowledge" relation might be used to interpret Barbeau's thought. In this regard, a central concern of her analysis is to shed light on how Barbeau's writings reflect his efforts to elevate the cultural and linguistic standards of French Québécois. Martin quite adeptly captures — through her tightly organized thematic chapters — Barbeau's views on cultural matters. These include a commitment to liberalism, universalism and the elevation of the French language, and a rejection of American cultural imperialism. She also effectively situates Barbeau within the context of a burgeoning nationalism in Quebec, particularly as this pertained to the counterpoised "liberal" and "conservative" points of view.

While fascinating and insightful, her account might have addressed in more detail how it was that Barbeau's rather unique approach to journalism was able to find its place within the newspapers for which he worked. How for instance, did the stance that he took in his columns relate to the overall editorial policies of the newspapers? She does allude to the fact that Barbeau's style of journalism was anathema to Henri Bourassa's conservative *Le Devoir*, but she might have said more about why *La*

had two children, but the marriage was an unhappy one. As the marriage was ending, she learned that he might have been a bigamist, which would mean her children were illegitimate. She began writing for publication in the late 1880s. Her byline, "Kit", first appeared in the *Mail's* Women's Kingdom column in October, 1889. She ran the Kingdom until 1911, then worked as a freelancer until her death four years later. Her chief claim to professional fame is her trip to Cuba during the Spanish-American conflict of 1898, when she apparently became the first woman in the world accredited as a war correspondent. Like Faith Fenton, Kit married a doctor, Theobald Coleman, somewhat late in life. She too moved north, living for a time in Copper Cliff, Ontario, before returning to southern Ontario. She was a founding member of the Canadian Women's Press Club and became its first president. Faith Fenton was also an early member.

37 Such a tightly focused treatment stands in stark contrast to Hélène Pelletier's *Oliver Asselin et son temps* (Montreal, 1996).

*Presse, La Patrie* and *Le Nationaliste* were more receptive to his work. The study is also limited by its almost total reliance on a textual analysis of Barbeau's columns, to the neglect of sources that might have shed more light on how his work was informed by his experiences and interactions. More analysis of the extent to which the material and institutional constraints of the daily press affected what Barbeau was able to write, and how he dealt with those limitations would have strengthened Martin's study.

Patrick Brennan's *Reporting the Nation's Business: Press-Government Relations During the Liberal Years* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994) takes the biographical sub-genre in a somewhat different direction. The book sets out to examine an important, yet virtually neglected, issue in the history of Canadian journalism, namely the relationship between the press and the government from 1935 to 1957, a period of unbroken rule by Liberal governments. To this end, the work integrates case studies of particular episodes involving press-state relations with the career biographies of a number of influential political journalists. It considers, for instance, the stand taken by the *Financial Post* in the "rearmament" question before the Second World War and it also examines the careers of Grant Dexter, George Ferguson, Blair Fraser, Ken Wilson and Bruce Hutchison. The book contains much insightful material concerning these men, most of whom have not received much attention. Brennan effectively demonstrates the extent to which they identified with the policies and approaches of successive Liberal mandarins.

Like David Mackenzie's discussion of Arthur Irwin's background, Brennan shows how the outlooks of the journalists he considers were rooted in the ideas of particular intellectual circles, such as the Canadian Institute for International Affairs. This group was part of an emergent public-policy elite, comprising both Liberal elected officials and civil servants, which has variously been designated as "The Ottawa Men"<sup>38</sup> or the "Government Generation."<sup>39</sup> Among other things, both journalists and public servants, as Brennan points out, shared a commitment to internationalism and a greater role for the federal government. This convergence of views, enhanced by common social networks, made for a relationship between the press and the government which was, more often than not, cosy and cooperative. Brennan shows, for instance, how just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War Lester Pearson (at the time, the Canadian High Commission's political officer in London) allowed Grant Dexter to read the summaries of Foreign Office files that Pearson was preparing. Dexter, in turn, cabled or mailed memoranda based on these files to the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

While the book's claims about the close identification of the journalists in question with the Liberal mandarins are well-supported, it does not really explain why this was the case. Nor is it easy to gauge the extent of their influence and the importance of their role in generating support for Liberal policies. Brennan's inability to satisfactorily address issues such as these stems from the emphasis he places on the views and actions of particular journalists. The book creates the impression that the

38 J. L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto, 1982).

39 Douglas Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1986).



key to understanding press-state relations during the Liberal-dominated period in question lies with the predispositions of particular journalists. Yet it is not entirely clear how the standpoints of journalists can be separated from the newspapers for which they worked. The latter, while receiving some attention, are not at the centre of Brennan's analysis. His case for a Liberal bias on the part of the journalists he studied would have been strengthened considerably had Brennan probed more into how they worked with their editors to formulate their positions.

Overall, the works examined here serve notice that the biographical sub-genre is becoming much more diverse, both in terms of the subject matter chosen and the approaches used. This trend represents a welcome departure from the earlier tendency to confine biographies to celebratory works of only the most powerful and influential print-media figures.

Studies of particular newspapers or journalism institutions, like general surveys, memoirs and biographies, have tended to examine them in terms of connections to elite figures who left a mark on them.<sup>40</sup> It cannot be denied that dominant individuals shaped the newspapers and organizations they created and/or directed, but it is misleading to assume, as is often the case, that the essence of a print medium can be captured by studying the career of such a person. This shortcoming is evident in William March's *Red Line: The Chronicle Herald and the Mail Star, 1875-1954* (Halifax, Chebucto Agencies Limited, [distributed by Acadiensis Press], 1986), an account of the complex of four newspapers, the *Herald*, the *Mail*, the *Chronicle* and the *Star*, as they emerged in post-Confederation Halifax. He charts their development up until the death in 1954 of W. H. Dennis, the publisher-editor of what became (in 1949) the *Chronicle-Herald*. While the work is scrupulously researched and detailed, it suffers for having told the story from the standpoint of the three key figures who served as editor-publisher of the *Herald*, namely, J. J. Stewart, William Dennis, and the latter's nephew, W. H. Dennis. It largely fails to address how the growth of the newspaper was linked to broader changes, such as technological transformation, new journalism practices, and the impact of other media. With its tight focus on the three editor-publishers, it gives insufficient attention to all of the others who worked at the newspaper over the years. The book, nevertheless, is not without its merits. It traces how the continuation of owner as editor-publisher at the *Herald* over three generations allowed the paper to retain its strident Conservative party loyalties well past the time when overtly partisan journals had supposedly vanished.

What makes the work particularly fascinating is its examination of the rivalry between the *Chronicle* and the *Star* on the one hand, and the *Herald* and the *Mail* on the other, supported by extensive data on such matters as circulation and levels of patronage. Like Nolan's tribute to Walter Blackburn this is a commissioned work, but it does not shy away from direct criticism. March also persuasively argues that the

40 The titles of some of the works dealing with particular newspaper institutions reflect this tendency: Murray Donnelly, *Dafoe of the Free Press* (Toronto, 1968); Charles Bruce, *News and the Southams* (Toronto, 1968); Ross Harkness, *J. E. Atkinson of the Star* (Toronto, 1963); Ron Poulton, *The Paper Tyrant: John Ross Robertson of the Toronto Telegram*. (Toronto, 1971). Douglas Fetherling's *A Little Bit of Thunder: The Strange Inner Life of the Kingston Whig-Standard* (Toronto, 1993) while consistent with the tradition of placing influential publishers and editors at the center of discussion, gives a good deal of attention to the *Whig-Standard* as a cultural institution.

party press contributed to public debate, a state of affairs that he contrasts effectively with the tepid and timid role played by the newspapers in Halifax subsequent to the “mergers” of 1948. Indeed, March makes a compelling case that the paper’s audience came to constitute a public, and that W. H. Dennis saw himself primarily as a “publicist” rather than as an editor-publisher. While the book contains abundant material that could have underpinned a probing interpretation of the newspapers’ historical significance, the author, regrettably, does not venture into theoretical reflections of this kind.

In contrast to the approach used by March in *Red Line*, David Hayes does not confine his attention to the evolving line of policy as developed by the publishers and editors of Canada’s national newspaper. As the book jacket of *Power and Influence: The Globe and Mail and the News Revolution* (Toronto, Key Porter, 1992) announces, Hayes “examines the newsroom itself; the complex, and often indefinable way in which journalists create news stories; and the ‘business’ of news, from autocratic, eccentric owners and opinionated editors and writers, to competing newspapers, circulation wars, disgruntled advertisers and readers”. To be sure, the book does not examine these various interests in equal measure. Its focus is still on the policies and practices of upper management, particularly those related to the news division, but it does demonstrate with great effect how the interplay of institutional forces and individual propensities has propelled the *Globe and Mail* along a particular trajectory. Ostensibly, the book examines the transformation of the *Globe and Mail* in terms of a broader “news revolution”, particularly in relation to the challenge to newspapers posed by television. It is not clear this claim can be sustained, particularly given that television began to reach the saturation limit in Canadian households by the mid 1950s. Had the competition of television been the major factor in determining the path taken by the *Globe and Mail* and other newspapers, then surely this crisis would have occurred in the 1950s rather than during the next three decades — the period receiving the bulk of Hayes’s attention.

What his study reveals, rather, is how the *Globe and Mail* has increasingly catered to the needs of the corporate world, with the *Report on Business* gradually becoming the centre of its operations. This trend was particularly in evidence during Roy Megarry’s tenure as publisher, when the paper embraced a sleeker management style and tilted its news coverage toward a business point of view.<sup>41</sup> Despite the impressive evidence that the *Globe and Mail’s* identity was at odds with its growing bias towards the point of view of corporate Canada, Hayes’s criticisms are muted. While he acknowledges the pro-business direction of the *Globe and Mail*, he also wishes to emphasize what he considers to be improvements in the quality of journalism and news coverage, particularly under the direction of William Thorsell, who was appointed editor-in-chief in 1990. It may be that Hayes’s commitment to the leitmotif of a “news revolution” made it difficult for him to elaborate a critique of the *Globe*

41 Not only were anti-business writers such as Linda McQuaig purged, but the coverage of labour issues — which had once been a staple of the *Globe and Mail* reportage — was all but eliminated. Moreover, The *Globe and Mail* belied its claims to be “Canada’s national newspaper” with its decision to concentrate its circulation in urban areas, where most of Canada’s business class lived and worked, and to close its Newfoundland bureau.

and *Mail* without abandoning his interpretive framework. Retaining the progress towards better and more effective news gathering and reporting as the core of his narrative, meant his evaluations of the *Globe and Mail* were bound to follow suit; they largely address questions of seriousness and sophistication of reportage rather than the shifting political and ideological orientation taken by the paper. This caveat aside, the book is exemplary in its discussion of particular episodes in the recent history of the *Globe*, such as personnel changes (for example, the sacking of Barbara Yaffe and Geoffrey Stevens), the coverage given to particular issues and events (such as John Gray's feature on immigration in France), and the impact of changes in ownership and leadership. While Hayes's writing is engaging, he lapses at times into overly inventive renditions of events, such as an effusive re-enactment of reporter Kathleen Kritzweiser's encounter with Marshall McLuhan. His claims about the chaotic and contradictory nature of the *Globe and Mail* might not be entirely borne out by the material that he presents, but he certainly manages to capture the complexity and nuance of its institutional culture.

In *Sketches from a Young Country: The Images of Grip Magazine* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997), Carman Cumming turns his considerable skills as a conventional biographer to a different kind of biography. This is the life story of the satirical illustrated magazine known as *Grip*, drawn and edited by John W. Bengough. *Grip* appeared in 1873, flourished in the 1880s, then faded after Bengough was ousted as editor in 1892. Bengough tried to revive *Grip* in 1894, but the effort flagged and the magazine shut down. *Grip* is a fascinating, though difficult, subject for study. As Cumming notes, it provided a running commentary — in words and cartoons — on its times. The problem with running commentaries, of course, is that they are fleeting and passing things. Some of political content in the cartoons Cumming includes in his book is hard for a modern audience to grasp.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the expected chapters on politics, Cumming examines what *Grip* has to say about the race and creed conflicts of the 1880s, the opening of the West and imperialism. He also explores elements of *Grip's* social conscience. A chapter on the press wars of the era reminds us that much of what contemporary and modern readers learned about the personalities behind the Toronto newspapers came from the pages of *Grip*.

Because *Grip* was so much the product of Bengough, *Sketches from a Young Country* provides a biography of the cartoonist too. He emerges as a tragic figure — a bright, funny and talented man who lost his audience when he lost *Grip*. Perhaps saddest of all is that he “seems to have lost faith in his special craft” as well (p. 224).

42 For example, one cartoon titled “getting ready for the killing” (p. 5) shows Sir John A. Macdonald turning a stone marked “franchise act” while a man in judicial robes prepares to sharpen a knife labelled “revising power”. In the back is a penned pig, labelled “grit party”. Cumming explains (p. 5) that the cartoon was part of a long-standing effort to show Macdonald's franchise reform as partisan manipulation. The “revising power” knife refers to Tory legislation to bring enumeration under federal control. His interest in this cartoon is not so much its political message but its cultural one: it shows how *Grip's* cartoons revealed aspects of 19th century life that are lost today — in this case, the way farmers slaughtered pigs. It is this kind of attempt to see the reformist (at times radical) *Grip* as a product of its Protestant, Victorian Ontario culture that gives the book its strength.

A somewhat darker figure in *Grip's* story is T. Phillips Thompson, the pioneering socialist who helped create *Grip* and then helped kill it 20 years later.<sup>43</sup> Cumming contends that together Thompson and Bengough gave *Grip* "a verve that neither could have achieved on his own" (p. 28). Thompson took over *Grip* when Bengough was forced out in 1892. Thereafter not only did the quality of the cartoons decline, but the commentary "lost its whimsical quality and took on an air of unrelieved didacticism" (p. 170). Given that *Grip* printed commentary and cartoons, any book on it would have to include substantial servings of both. This one does. The cartoons are for the most part well presented, though some have been shrunk so much to fit on the page that they are cramped. Nonetheless, *Sketches from a Young Country* is a readable mix of illustration, quotation and analysis. It represents a solid addition to the body of work examining particular newspapers and magazines, a collection of material which until recently has been rather meagre in its range and limited in its interpretive scope.

The works in the final sub-genre, give attention through thematic historical studies to how the development of the print media in Canada is related to the political, economic, cultural and technological events in the larger society. Rather than offering a broad-scale account chronicling the rise and fall of a variety of print media along the lines of the general surveys examined above, thematic studies give attention to the overall pattern of transformation within a distinct time-frame. The works examined here concentrate on a single development in a single epoch: the emergence and development of the commercial press in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Paul Rutherford's pathbreaking work, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982), represented the first major effort to address how and why the "modern" newspaper in Canada took shape. He argues that in the newly industrialized, commercial society of late 19th-century Canada, advertising came to supplant earlier forms of newspaper financing (such as subscriptions and patronage); by the 1890s it accounted for two-thirds of newspaper revenue. Rutherford maintains that vigorous competition for readers and advertising revenue, especially in big cities like Toronto and Montreal, led to newspapers that were not only larger, but offered a greater variety of information — all to the benefit of the readers (p. 110).

Rutherford's book contains exhaustive research on circulation growth and revenues, technological developments inside the newspaper and changes in content — especially the decline of the importance of the editorial page and the growing emphasis on news and features. He also stresses the role of the mass press in promulgating a variety of myths including the dogma of modernity (emphasizing the benefits of growth, progress and democracy), the gospel of order (supporting domestic peace and good government) and the gospel of harmony (stressing joint work and opposing labour strife). A favourite theme was the businessman as hero (p. 156).

While Rutherford's work broke new ground in Canadian media historiography, his theoretical approach is nonetheless problematic. He takes as his starting point the

43 See Russell Hann, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E. E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson and the *Toronto News*, 1883-1887", in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976).

notion that mass communication research looks at who says what to whom and with what effect, a research formula popularized by scholars in the United States.<sup>44</sup> Rutherford neglects, however, to examine *why* and *how* this process of communication takes place, and thus fails to adequately examine the extent to which powerful interests control the media. He also takes as given a number of notions that should be interrogated more closely. For example, he asserts that newspapers gave people what they wanted and does not seriously consider whether the newspapers served the public's true desires (whatever those may have been) or instead produced something that would simply sell better. In addition, he assumes that the "people's press" was the product of working people. But aside from the *Toronto Star*, which was founded and run for a relatively brief time by striking printers from other papers, the popular papers were started by entrepreneurs. These were men who had something to sell — news to readers, readers to advertisers and the benefits of capitalism to the Canadian public.

Rutherford provides information on ownership and control, but seems unsure about how to analyse it. As well he occasionally falls into the trap of taking at face value the self-congratulatory statements about the press made by people running the press — statements about how the role of the press was to espouse public service or how the large-circulation daily satisfied the public's craving for news. He argues, for example, that the growing preference for news "crippled the role that papers had played as key actors in the national debate" (p. 233). But was the crippling factor really a demand for news, or a push toward commercialization, in the newspaper itself and in the broader society, that emphasized the economic side of the political-economic coin?

Thomas Walkom's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation<sup>45</sup> looks in greater detail at the economic forces at work in the newspaper business in Toronto and Ottawa during the late 19th century and concludes that the key factor was overhead costs. In each city, specific demographic, economic and political contexts allowed dailies to develop and grow. This growth required increasing investments in plant and equipment — new buildings, new presses, linotype machines, expanded work forces and so on — which in turn forced the papers to look for additional sources of income. Walkom argues that in Toronto, the newspapers hustled to expand their circulation "geographically and across social classes" (p. iii). In Ottawa, by contrast, newspapers solved their overhead cost problems by political patronage, government printing and eventually, collusion. Walkom challenges the idea that the readership of the Toronto press was

44 This formula was the defining mantra for communications studies for many years. Although generally attributed to Harold Lasswell, it actually was devised by John Marshall, assistant director of the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, as a "chart" to bring order to material presented at a special seminar on communications organized and funded by the Foundation in 1939. Lasswell took part in the seminar and likely adapted his famous schema from the discussions that took place. See Seminar Memorandum No. 6: Summary of Discussions of Communications Seminar, 16 February 1940. RF. RG 1.1, series 200, box 224, folder 2678, Princeton Radio Research Project, Rockefeller Archive Center. Pocantico Hills, N.Y. See also William J. Buxton, "From Radio Research to Communications Intelligence: Rockefeller Philanthropy, Communications Specialists, and the American Intelligence Community", in Alain-G. Gagnon and Stephen Brooks, eds., *The Political Influence of Ideas: Policy Communities and the Social Sciences* (Westport, Conn., 1994).

45 Walkom, "The Daily Newspaper Industry".

divided sharply along class lines. His research shows that even the most highbrow papers always had a readership among working people, and sought to increase that readership as a way of expanding circulation and attracting more advertising. He also finds that none of the “people’s dailies” catered exclusively to the working class. In sum, Walkom’s dissertation is noteworthy for the pioneering way that it draws on insights from political economy to illuminate the transformation of particular Canadian newspapers in the late 19th century.

Jean de Bonville examines the transformation of Canadian newspapers from a somewhat different angle than that of Rutherford and Walkom in *La Presse Québécoise de 1884 à 1914: Genèse d’un média de masse* (Québec, Les Presses de l’université Laval, 1988). He argues that the “journal d’information” did not simply replace the “journal d’opinion” but instead grew up around it.<sup>46</sup> “La feuille traditionnelle et le journal d’opinion n’ont pas disparu: ils se sont fondus dans le nouveau journal, le journal d’information” (p. 355). This is an interesting insight, one that captures well the idea of constant negotiation and renegotiation of the conditions of production for an industry in transition.

De Bonville begins with a persuasive analysis of how the prevailing communications and transportation network, along with factors such as urbanization, industrialization and increasing literacy, gave rise to a massive transformation of newspapers in Quebec in the late 19th century. His meticulously researched account provides a wealth of data (presented in numerous maps, charts, and tables) on matters such as the pattern of the emergence and disappearance of journals and newspapers, new technology and the production process, investment and financing, conditions of work and market penetration. He gives particular attention to the transition of the press to a mass medium, arguing that technological, cultural and demographic factors were not sufficient to induce this change. He maintains, rather, that “L’intervention d’un autre secteur va déclencher la mutation. Cet élément moteur, l’activité industrielle le génère afin d’assurer et d’accélérer la circulation des marchandises: c’est la publicité” (p. 361). Advertisers favoured newspapers that would reach the biggest markets. In their quest to recoup high production costs and attract advertisers, publishers began to see readers as consumers rather than citizens. They also developed a new range of products to offer to a consumer society: local news, “faits divers”, entertainment and features.

De Bonville provides insights into the changing forms of journalism, in particular the rise of the parliamentary report. In the pre-commercial days, he argues, “Source d’information, rédacteur, éditeur et lecteurs appartiennent tous à un même courant d’opinion” (pp. 366-7). The commercial press created a distance between the medium and those who wanted to use it for political purposes; this required the negotiation of a new relationship between political parties and the press. The rise of the reporter created a work force controlled by the city editor, not the publisher or the political party. Interviews and reports on political speeches came to replace the old practice of publishing full texts of speeches. “Le passage de la propriété des journaux de groupes politiques à des groupes de financiers fait des partis politiques des objets plutôt que les sujets du discours de presse” (p. 367). Combining theoretical sophistication with

46 He derived this distinction from Beaulieu and Hamelin, *La presse québécoise*.



exhaustive research, de Bonville's landmark study has become a point of reference for historical study of the growth of print media in Quebec and in Canada.

Minko Sotiron's *From Politics to Profit: The Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890-1920* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), like de Bonville's study, focuses on a 30-year time span but begins in 1890 rather than 1884. Despite differences in periodization and in the selection of newspapers they consider, the two authors reach strikingly similar conclusions. Both examine the process through which newspapers were fundamentally transformed, particularly in relation to capitalist industrialization. Moreover, both books are written from a critical standpoint that decries the changes that have taken place. De Bonville observes that newspapers in Quebec, as a result of their transformation, had become primarily vehicles for advertising: "En définitive, la publicité n'existe que par et pour le capitalisme commercial et industriel; elle met la presse au service du capitalisme" (p. 347). While Sotiron shares this moral perspective in relation to the commodification of the press with capitalism, this concern is inflected by a dismay and concern with the concentration of control and ownership of Canadian media into increasingly fewer hands. His study represents an effort to trace the origins of press concentration demonstrated with such force and clarity by two influential inquiries: The Davey Committee<sup>47</sup> and the Kent Commission.<sup>48</sup> It is this over-riding concern with concentration and its threat to democracy that differentiates Sotiron's study from that of de Bonville and the others who have examined the changes in the late 19th century.

Sotiron traces this path of concentration to the formation of the Southam chain of newspapers which, in 1912, placed its three dailies within the same corporate structure under the control of a central organization. This development, he argues, ushered in a new era for Canadian newspapers. By 1919, the "lively and competitive markets" which had existed before the war had given way to a growing monopolization of the newspaper market by large corporate interests. As Sotiron suggests, "the steady expansion of the Southam chain showed that national combinations, not local dominance, would be the key to future newspaper survival" (p. 92).

The concentration of newspaper ownership through the proliferation of chains, Sotiron suggests, could be seen as part of an overall trend for newspapers to protect their interests by colluding and stifling competition (ch. 5). It was the culmination of a pattern of development that began to take form after Confederation, namely the "metamorphosis of the newspaper from a nineteenth century partisan organ to twentieth-century corporation" (p. 6). Echoing the views of de Bonville and Rutherford, he places the staggering growth of advertising revenues at the centre of this shift. This new source of income made the technological transformation of the production process possible, allowing publishers to reach an ever increasing mass audience with the advertisements that their newspapers carried. Armed with the evidence of increased circulation, the publishers could demand higher rates from their advertisers, and could also attract new clients into the fold. As Sotiron convincingly

47 Senate Special Committee on the Mass Media, vol. 1, *The Uncertain Mirror*, (Ottawa, 1970).

48 Royal Commission on Newspapers, *Report*, prepared by Chairman Tom Kent et al. (Ottawa, 1981).

demonstrates, the circulation/advertising equation developed into the primary concern of Canadian newspapers during the period in question. Their owners were under continual pressure to keep their circulation at high levels in order to survive. This reliance on a wider readership to attract advertising revenues obliged newspapers to reduce their political role and to become less partisan in their news coverage. News, in effect, was transformed from information into a commodity to be sold. Indeed, Sotiron maintains that the distinction between news and advertising copy became quite blurred.

Sotiron argues that these changes were accompanied (and made possible by) newspaper publishers increasingly taking on the role as entrepreneurs, “independent, risk-taking agents whose innovations involved bringing economic resources in new ways” (p. 7). As the newspapers became large, bureaucratic organizations, more sophisticated accounting and administration procedures were introduced, and the business side of the newspaper came to dominate the editorial side. While this path of development was potentially quite lucrative, it was also extremely expensive. It meant that the levels of investment required to own and run a newspaper became prohibitive, excluding all but the very wealthy. This meant, in turn, that the main benefactors of newspapers became “bankers and wealthy financiers” rather than politicians. Instead of championing political parties, newspapers now conveyed the views of business and entrepreneurial interests to the government.

Sotiron’s account is coherent, persuasively argued and well-supported by evidence. But aspects of his work can be called into question. While he certainly demonstrates that big business came to dominate newspapers, it is unclear how this domination inevitably led to the concentration of ownership. While tendencies along these lines certainly existed in the period after the First World War, they did not begin to accelerate until much later, when concentration became recognized as a serious problem. Given such a significant lapse of time, were the roots of concentration really in the situation Sotiron describes or were they the result of other intervening factors, such as the Depression, the Second World War, or American domination of the Canadian economy? Moreover, though not stated explicitly, Sotiron seems to hold the view that the transformation of news from information to commodity, attendant upon the commercialization of newspapers, signified a regrettable development. The notion that the main concern of earlier newspapers was to deliver information to their readers is open to challenge. And while he shows that newspapers became more oriented towards business and advertising, he offers little evidence that they were any the worse as a result. Finally, while his arguments about the changing partisanship of newspapers are quite subtle and sophisticated, they do not seem to account for newspapers, such as those described in March’s *Red Line*, that retained their partisan nature until almost mid-century, or for others, such as the *Globe and Mail*, which resisted modern business methods. What is problematic about his account is that he seems to work with a general model of newspapers that does not capture the mixes of partisanship, political affiliations, and commitment to business that newspapers have exhibited. If preparing this review has taught us anything, it is that newspapers in Canada have differed enormously in terms of these features and can be fit into a general model only with difficulty.

Taken as a group, the four thematic studies discussed here thoroughly examine the transformation of the Canadian newspaper in the 19th century. Read together, they

offer a fairly complete picture of the transformations taking place in Canadian newspapers during the period. True, they suffer somewhat from the problems of present-mindedness, whiggishness and compartmentalization:<sup>49</sup> their focus is the daily press (the main form of newspapers today) and they concentrate to a substantial degree on the successful daily press, the journals that continue publication today. Indeed, one of the most striking factors in Canadian media history is the enormous number of publications and titles that did *not* survive. And these books tend to ignore other forms, such as the magazine press.<sup>50</sup> Above all (though with greater or lesser success), they seek to present the newspaper in its larger social context and to consider the push and pull of economic, social and political forces extant during crucial years in the transformation of Canada's newspapers.

These four studies share an analytical approach that implicitly bases itself on the distinction between the press and journalism identified by de Bonville. In his view, the press refers to the organizations and enterprises that occupy an economic and social space. Journalism, in contrast, refers to the content of newspapers and the methods used to produce it.<sup>51</sup> Though differing in emphasis, the four studies seek to understand the interplay between newspaper institutions (as situated within a broader context) and their form and content,<sup>52</sup> during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Such an approach — if it could be extended and applied to other historical periods — could serve as the basis for generating a rapprochement among the various sub-genres of writing on the history of Canadian journalism and print media. Running through this body of work is a tendency to focus on either the press (or print media for that matter) or journalism to the neglect of the other. General surveys of print media history and discussions of particular newspapers and press associations give particular attention to how the organizations as a whole emerged and developed. Biographies and first-person accounts, in contrast, place more emphasis on the form and content of what was produced by print-media organizations, in terms of such things as the editorial line taken or the political content of reportage.<sup>53</sup> What the four thematic studies demonstrate is the fruitfulness of examining the reciprocal — and often dialectical — relationship between the organization of newspapers (as actors in a broader economic and social context) and the texts they produced and circulated.<sup>54</sup>

49 This tendency was remarked on by John C. Nerone, "A Local History of the Early U.S. Press: Cincinnati, 1793-1848", in William S. Solomon and Robert W. McChesney, eds., *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History* (Minneapolis, 1993).

50 Rutherford and de Bonville do attempt to examine some forms that fell by the wayside, such as the church-sponsored press.

51 De Bonville, *La Presse Québécoise*, p. 2.

52 In this respect, they echo Harold Innis's approach to the history of "space-binding" print media developed in such works as "The Newspaper in Economic Development", *Journal of Economic History*, 2, December, 1942 (supplement), pp. 1-33. See also William J. Buxton "Harold Innis's Excavation of Modernity: The Newspaper Industry, Communications, and the Decline of Public Life", *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 23, 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 321-339.

53 This tendency is much less marked in some of the recent works we have reviewed here, such as in Cumming's biography of Farrer and in Doyle's memoir.

54 With their emphasis upon how the products of journalism are constructed within particular institutional settings, the thematic studies could serve as a foundation for incorporating insights from work on the social or labour history of print media, much of which has appeared in essay form rather than in full-scale studies. See, for instance, Gregory S. Kealey, "Work Control, the Labour Process, and Nineteenth Century Canadian Printers", in *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal, 1995);

More generally, the presence of this emergent body of work has important implications for how one reads the history of print media and journalism in Canada. Surveys, as we have indicated, tend to be superficial and schematic, with periodization based on weakly conceived notions of historical process and change. If, however, they are read in conjunction with thematic studies, it is possible to gain a sense of the broader dynamic at work in the emergence and development of the newspapers and magazines that they chronicle.

Biographies and memoirs, traditionally at least, have tended to recount personal experiences to the neglect of the analysis and interpretation of the broader rules, practices, and policies of particular newspapers or magazines. For this reason, they have routinely been dismissed by print-media historians as unreliable. It may be the case that this rejection could be attributed to circumstance rather than to the shortcomings of this sub-genre per se. Given that until recently almost no thorough or systematic histories of Canadian print media and journalism had been written, it was often necessary to turn to biographies and memoirs to gain understanding of broader developments. But such accounts, almost by their very nature, represent events and experiences from the standpoint of a particular individual; they are not designed to carry the sort of historical weight that scholars seem to expect of them. With the appearance of recent works that offer detailed and thorough analyses of a particular period, biographies and memoirs need no longer be read as historical studies; they can now be used for the much more fruitful and productive task of capturing the nature of lived experience as played out within the structures and institutions that have been examined with more care and rigour by thematic studies.

This cluster of recent writings also has important implications for the smaller body of work comprising research on particular print media. As we have noted, these have had a tendency to dwell on the powerful individuals that left their mark upon these institutions. If such texts are read in conjunction with thematic studies, a more balanced picture emerges. They help us judge whether what has been attributed to an influential figure can be better understood as part of a broader set of developments. Moreover, rather than examining particular newspapers or magazines in isolation, they can be placed within a broader socio-economic context and examined in relation to overarching transformations.

Above all, the appearance of these thematic studies creates the possibility of historiographical debate concerning the development of print media and journalism in Canada. While historical work on newspapers and magazines in Canada has been steadily increasing, it has not been characterized by the generation of new claims and arguments leading to focused discussion. Authors routinely cite other material deemed to be relevant to their own studies, but they seldom call into question the

Russell Hann, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor"; Armand Saint-Jean, "D'Hier à Aujourd'hui: Petite Histoire Sociale du Journalisme au Québec", *Québec Studies*, 18, (1994), pp. 75-95; David R. Spencer, "Alternative Visions: The Intellectual Heritage of Nonconformist Journalists in Canada", in Hanno Hardt and Bonnie Brennan, eds., *Newworkers: Toward A History of the Rank and File* (Minneapolis, 1995). The Hardt and Brennan collection, with its emphasis upon telling the history of print media from the standpoint of newworkers, represents an important corrective to conventional accounts.

historiographical assumptions of other work, nor do they challenge its empirical generalizations.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, those writing historical accounts of print media in Canada give the impression that they do not see their work as connected to a commonly recognized body of literature. This means that they neither situate their research in relation to other works nor make comparisons between their study and other cases that might serve as effective points of contrast. Moreover, in Canada, unlike the United States, there has been virtually no debate about how the history of print media and journalism should be written.<sup>56</sup>

Given that the thematic studies cover much of the same ground, yet come up with different assessments and conclusions, there are some promising lines for historiographical debate. A tension obviously exists between Rutherford's guarded celebration of the "modernizing" newspaper and the much more critical stance taken by Walkom, De Bonville and Sotiron. Which evaluation is the more reasonable, given the available evidence? There are also differing views on how the transition should be characterized. Sotiron and Rutherford, as well as others such as Cumming, maintain that a "party" press was supplanted by a corporate press. De Bonville, on the other hand, argues that a "presse d'information" grew up around the earlier "presse d'opinion", the vestige of which survived in the form of the editorial. These authors also differ in their conceptions of the political partisanship of newspapers, and in their characterizations of how this partisanship was transformed. There is room for further debate concerning issues such as the nature of political patronage and the form of support that came to supplant it.<sup>57</sup>

Sotiron's quest to discover the origins of current media concentration, and de Bonville's efforts to expose the lineages of cultural hegemony, are testimony to the urgency of our engagement with the history of newspapers and magazines in Canada. It is only through laying bare the roots of our wilted public life that we can grasp how contemporary print media and journalistic practices might be invigorated to serve collective needs.<sup>58</sup>

WILLIAM J. BUXTON and CATHERINE McKERCHER

55 By way of contrast, the history of print media in the United States has been marked by lively historiographical debate. See, for instance, John C. Nerone, "The Mythology of the Penny Press", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4 (1987), pp. 376-404. Nerone's article was accompanied by comments on his essay written by prominent scholars in the field, followed by his response to their commentaries.

56 James Carey's reflections on the history of practice of journalism in the United States have been particularly noteworthy in this regard. See, for instance "The Problem of Journalism History", *Journalism History*, 1 (Spring, 1974), pp. 3-5, 27; "Why and How? The Dark Continent of American Journalism", in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., *Reading the News* (New York, 1986); Eve S. Munson and Catherine A. Warren, eds., *James Carey: A Critical Reader* (Minneapolis, 1997).

57 The issue of political patronage of newspapers has received a good deal of attention through works such as Norman Ward, "The Press and Patronage: An Exploratory Operation", J. H. Aitchison, ed., *The Political Process in Canada: Essays in Honour of R. MacGregor Dawson* (Toronto, 1963) and Brian P. N. Beaven, "Partisanship, Patronage, and the Press in Ontario, 1880-1914: Myths and Realities", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXIX, 3 (1983), pp. 317-351.

58 As the late Wilf Kesterton would undoubtedly agree, no discussion of the history of the Canadian print media is complete without a gardening metaphor.