

New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years, 1952-1978 By Janet B. Friskney

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I wonder why the authors limited themselves to Christian churches. In the strict sense of the word a 'church' is a Christian place of worship, of course, but *Canadian Churches* neglects to reflect places of worship within the current Canadian context. Particularly for the benefit of those living in Ontario today, I believe such a book should have included synagogues, temples and mosques. The reader's appreciation of churches and other places of worship would benefit from a better understanding of how religious practice or liturgy affects the design of places of worship and what they may have in common with one another. Perhaps there are universal architectural characteristics that permit one religion easily adapting for its own needs the place of worship of another. The Richardsons offer one or two examples within a multicultural context, but they did not sufficiently explore how the changes would be managed. More floor plans and diagrams could perhaps have helped clarify the progression of physical changes.

"Changes" is a brief but mixed chapter that includes a history of church building from early Christian times to the Baroque period. At first I thought I was going to embark on an essay of how a church building may have been altered over time. Stewart Brand's classic *How Buildings Learn* is the subject I expected, but in this chapter the Richardsons focus principally on institutional changes in the context of the society of the times. The chapter concludes with introducing the auditorium plan typically associated today with suburban megachurches. The bulk of

this chapter could have been dealt with in the introduction. Christian revivalism and megachurches could have been introduced in relation to current threats to traditional or older churches with dwindling congregations. Adaptive re-use and development pressures in the urban context could have been addressed more coherently in one section, or perhaps as a postscript or afterword. I find that this chapter does not add clarity to the variety or understanding of churches seen on the Canadian landscape. Change is a worthwhile topic, but placing it at the end leaves me with the impression that this chapter is an afterthought.

Despite these concerns, *Canadian Churches* is an excellent sampler and introduction to Christian churches and theology during the last three centuries. It will leave the reader better informed about religious heritage in Ontario and beyond, and more appreciative of the efforts at preserving that national legacy. It will be a constant source book in my library and I recommend it for yours.

John J.-G. Blumenson
Toronto

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- Brand, Stewart. *How Buildings Learn: what happens after they're built*. New York: Viking, 1994.
Brown, W. Douglas. *Eden Smith: Toronto's arts and crafts architect*. Mississauga: privately published, 2003.
Cruickshank, Dan, ed. *Sir Banister Fletcher's 'a history of architecture.'* 20th ed. Boston: Architectural Press, 1996.

New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years, 1952-1978

By Janet B. Friskney. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xvii + 284 pp. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-8020-9746-0 (www.utppublishing.com)

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Toronto publisher McClelland and Stewart's 'New Canadian Library' series to the development and in-

stitutionalization of Canadian literature. Janet Friskney's *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years, 1952-1978* appears fifty years after the first four books in the

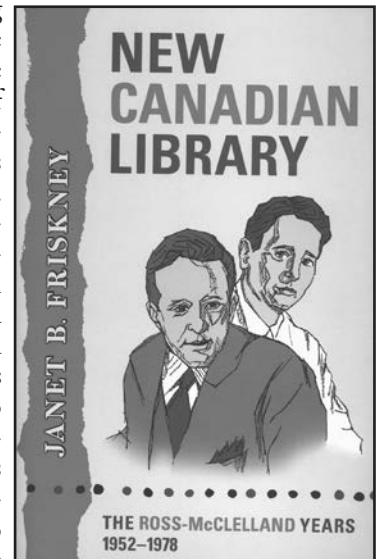
landmark series were published in 1958. Before the NCL there was no paperback series devoted to reprinting books by Canadian authors. This meant that the Canadian reading public had little sense of a national literature. Books by Canadians usually went out of print shortly after publication, and it was almost impossible to teach Canadian literature without accessible and affordable texts. The shape of the “Canadian canon” as we know it today owes much, for better or worse, to the NCL. Although the series is alive and well today under the editorship of University of Ottawa’s David Staines, Friskney focuses on the formative years when publisher Jack McClelland and Professor Malcolm Ross brought the NCL (and several related series) into being. Remarkably, between 1958 and 1978, they published, in the main series alone, 152 books that they considered Canadian classics.

New Canadian Library draws upon extensive archival research and constructs a compelling narrative of what went on behind the scenes as McClelland and Ross selected titles for the series, negotiated with authors, debated the merits of well-known and obscure books, devised marketing strategies to appeal to a fickle reading public, and struggled to make and keep the series financially viable. But the book is most interesting for the larger cultural and canonical issues it constantly raises and sometimes answers. One cannot help but be struck, for instance, by the public indifference to Canadian literature that the NCL usually encountered, even in the nationalistic years around the centennial. In 1967, about half the 58 titles then part of the series failed to sell 1,000 copies, and only five sold more than 2,500.

Friskney also confirms what many have long suspected: that titles in the NCL were not selected solely on the basis of their artistic or literary significance. Each title was subject to a series of negotiations and compromises as McClelland and Ross struggled to appeal to both an academic and general audi-

ence, to balance regional representation, and to strike a representative historical balance. Friskney also reveals the degree to which the series, and by extension the canon it informs, is the product of the sometimes idiosyncratic biases of its originators. Ross, for example, opposed the publication of what is now widely considered the most important Canadian novel of the 1960s – Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* – because he considered it an “extravaganza on the persistence of infantile sexuality” and a “very, very, sick book.” In many cases, titles published in the series were selected for their historical significance, or for their “Canadianness,” and not necessarily because they were the best books available.

The NCL has long been noteworthy, too, for its pioneering literary criticism. Most significantly, it introduced each title in the series with a critical essay penned by a Canadian writer or critic. In many cases, these introductions have been influential, and some constituted, at the time they were written, the most important critical statement on the book they introduce. Friskney reveals that these critical statements were designed to avoid offending authors and were careful not to be overly critical of the sometimes-flawed books they evaluated. In some instances, editorial practice was even more suspect and clumsily abridged or edited texts were allowed to appear in the series. Friskney’s observations encourage one to wonder how the methodology of the NCL founders has affected notions of a Canadian literature that



is sometimes considered of “inferior” quality to the literatures of other nations, and excessively solipsistic, nationalist and regionalist.

New Canadian Library has the paradoxical effect of both emphasizing and undermining the importance of the NCL in Canadian literary history. In other words, it reminds us that Canadian literature as we know it is the product of a process of selection in which personal biases, pragmatic and financial concerns, and sometimes-questionable editorial practice have played crucial roles. But the book is not so much a critique of the NCL as a reminder that readers ought to be both critical of and grateful for the series.

It is hard to find fault with Friskney’s timely, readable, and reasonable book. It does, however, seem unusual that she divides it into two parts: “The Historical Narrative”

is obviously meticulously researched and makes a strong claim to authority despite its selectiveness and the absence of key documents. The second section, “Editorial Practices and the Selective Tradition,” deals with a variety of theoretical issues that grow out of the history: canonical processes, selection of texts, editorial practice. The book might have been more effective had it not been bifurcated in a manner that suggests that literary history and theory exist in different realms. Friskney’s observations, in fact, consistently remind us that it is impossible to separate the historical development of the NCL from a range of fascinating cultural forces and theoretical concerns.

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My Life in Crime and Other Academic Adventures

By Martin L. Friedland. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xii + 513 pages. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-8020-9790-3 (www.utppublishing.com)

This book will probably have a mixed reception, largely because the author is writing for two different groups of readers—lawyers and academics—and may not satisfy both. Friedland is an academic lawyer who spent his career in the Faculty of Law of the University of Toronto rather than in practicing law. Much of the book consists of discussions of his contributions to various commissions of enquiry into legal and public policy issues. While this material will be new to lay readers it may not be new to lawyers. He spends relatively little of the book in discussion of the academic side of his career. Although the author is a lawyer writing about the law, the book is accessible to a wide readership because it is free of off-putting legalese and post-modern jargon. Professor Friedland writes well.

