

Is Canada's Literary Scene Worth Staying For? Canada vs. US, UK, & Europe

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Abstract

A research essay unfolding the complexity of Canada's new yet growing literary industry. Major cities around the world, including the US, UK, and parts of Europe have well-established publishing companies and very appealing opportunities for our local writing talent. In the 1960's, many Canadian felt that in order to find greater success in writing, moving away was a necessary step. This paper looks into examples of writers who have left, those who have returned, and the driving forces behind this movement. However, as the Canadian literary scene continues to grow and thrive, we also explore the current views of these authors to understand if there still is that same motivation to leave.

Keywords: Publishing Industry

The Publishing Industry Comparison

It is a commonality that all Canadian writers can stand behind: the publishing industry in Canada is not an easy one to infiltrate or flourish in, compared to publishing houses in other nations. Countless authors and publishers can vouch for that, as the decline in interest and success related to Canadian literature continues on. Authors such as Margaret Atwood, Kit Pearson, and Yann Martel have surpassed the average Canadian author experience and made a name for themselves worldwide. However, this really is not the case for everyone. The publishing industry in Canada is still relatively new compared to many larger and

more established cities around the world, including the US, UK, and parts of Europe. Because of this, relocating to these cities as authors is often a popular choice in the hopes of finding greater success and a long-lasting writing career. For example, in the US, we have what those in the publishing industry call the "Big 5." These 5 publishing houses include: Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, and Simon and Schuster. According to "The Big 5 Trade Book Publishers" by The Balance.com, a personal finance site, stated that all of these major publishing houses were located in one area: New York City.

This paper will tackle the reasons behind why Canada's literary industry is seen as an arduous and risky task for authors within the nation, and what strategies and solutions they have employed in order to overcome this national obstacle. The paper will focus on the history and overarching environment of the publishing industry within Canada, and will contain different news sources to unveil what is causing the shift in authors to leave behind their country in order to pursue potential fortune and fame in other zip codes, and whether that is truly the solution.

Penguin Random House itself has "nearly 250 imprints and publishing houses" under its name, according to the website. What makes New York City itself such a cultural hub for those that love reading and writing? With a plethora of bookstores, book signings, fairs and conventions, and being the home of both authors and readers alike, the city could be an industry in and of itself. For example, in the article, "Book Publishers in New New York City" by The Balance.com, New York City is "the birthplace of Barnes & Noble, the country's largest bookstore chain" and is also part of a "large literary community," as it's the home of the *New York Times*' "Book Review" as well as the National Book Critics Circle. Due to its significance in the publishing industry, the city has become a home for those that want to have their voices heard, as it is convenient to have everything at your fingertips. With major companies available for authors to run to for publishing their work, as well as so many examples of great writing around them, it's no wonder that many authors find it convenient as well as inspirational to be in the thick of things in New York City.

Canadian Literary Scene

Although relatively new to the scene, Canada has attempted to nurture its literary industry to help put Canada's name forward around the world as a literary hub as well. Major publishing companies including HarperCollins Canada and Penguin Random House Canada have left strong impressions on the globe and continue to produce bestselling work. Random House Canada was originally established in 1944, which was decades behind the first publishing house in the US, where some of their first few publishing houses were arising in the early 1800s. In particular, Canada experienced a boom in publishing companies around the 1960s which has then propelled a much stronger opportunity for local authors.

Before the 1960s, writers in Canada had to leave the nation in order to begin a career, as there were no publishing houses in Canada at the time. During the late 1960s, new publishing houses began to slowly surface, but that still didn't stop Canadian writers from migrating to other countries with more successful publishing industries, such as the United States and several countries within Europe. Canadian writers left the country because readers shunned most Canadian-based published works as second best, and most countries were reluctant to publish Canadian writers' novels unless an English or American editor was involved.

New publishing houses that were established in the 1960s contributed to the new growth, new writers, and growing audience that realized there was value and quality in Canadian authors and books. For example, from the years of 1963 to 1972, "the population of Canada grew by 17%, while the number of Canadian-authored, Canadian-published, English-language literary books increased 250%, more than 5 times the equivalent rise of books in [the US]," according to Maclean's article titled, "How CanLit was born" by Brian Bethune. This brought about the establishment of the Massey Commission to help protect national publishing industries from international competitors. The Massey Commission began as a way for art and culture in Canada to be filtered through a more tasteful lens; something that could define and differentiate our nation from others. Much of what is considered art and Canadian culture has to first be approved of by the

Massey Commission, as they are the gatekeepers of what constitutes acceptable and tasteful art in Canada. As writing is an art form itself, most of what is frowned upon by the Massey Commission in terms of novels and stories could very well be the next international bestseller. The commission itself does lend an extra hurdle to writers hoping to gain fortune and fame internationally, as what constitutes Canadian culture may not be appealing to those outside of our borders. Ironically, the Massey Commission was meant to protect Canada from being influenced or dependent on American standards of culture, but there can also be the issue of Canada not having a loud or influential voice itself. While the intention of creating Canadian culture is a noble one, it has also led to the fact that our nation is distanced from the success and power of the US in its literary industry.

Are Canadian Authors Staying Local?

In an article by thestar.com, the Toronto Star's online daily newspaper (Date of this publication?), the author shared that "the average income for authors from book royalties is about \$10,000 a year" and that while there are successful writers worldwide, and it is completely possible for authors to get the accreditation they crave for their work, it's also incredibly rare. For a lot of people who write, "it is supplementary income" while they also [teach], run writers' unions, or work for newspapers". It is a tough industry to break into and excel at for many, and for those that reside in Canada, the struggle is magnified by the restrictions. The lack of decent pay and support in the publishing industry (editors and authors both), makes it difficult for those who enjoy the craft to thrive. Not only are there less publishing houses in Canada, but they also hold less international "oomph" than publishing houses in the US and UK. All of these reasons make it difficult for those in the Canadian publishing industry to feel like they are part of something greater and more rewarding.

What Does the US, UK, and Europe Have That We Don't?

What is it about the pull of New York City that promises writers fortune, fame, and a home? In an article titled, "Why Writers Love New York City (And Then Leave It)" by The Atlantic, different authors share what initially pulled them into

the sweeping arms of the city, and why they either loved it or left it. It's a "landscape of cultures and geographies that for millions feels at once deeply personal and communal." The article featured writers such from the Brooklyn and Manhattan area, where anthologies were quoted, such as from Cheryl Strayd writing how she went to the city to "become one of the women clad in slim pants and interesting coats, and I was ready for the city, but instead, it held me at a cool distance." The author then went on to explain that the city is a projection of many writers and their fantasies and desires. It is an idolized and romanticized city for writers, pursuing fame and fortune, or simply, a place where their work can be heard, appreciated, and perhaps, loved. Authors in the article also spoke about how authors are "willing to sacrifice" and are able to "accept the hardships of being there purely because of the expectation that it will pay back."

One of the main reasons why writers left Canada was because they could only get quality editors and publishers in the States, France and Britain, mainly. These writers had to go in person to editors, or move to the country where their editor was located in order to get their manuscript assessed and worked on. It also took a long time for authors to mail their physical manuscripts as it would take a while to get a response before they could start editing their work; this could be very time consuming and exhausting for many writers.

A Written Example: Authors Who Relocated

A good example of a writer who left Canada for the United States, specifically Los Angeles, and made a name for herself is Naomi Guttman. Naomi moved with her husband to further her career in the US as the Canadian industry was not moving forward and struggling in the global market. Naomi ended up winning several poetry awards. Naomi Guttman's first collection of poems was published in the United States in 1992 marking the appearance of a deeply emotional, highly intelligent new voice. Its theme is intimacy, especially women's experience of intimacy in many forms and shape. Her book "*Reasons for Winter*" went on to win the Klein award for poetry. Her second, *Wet Apples, White Blood*, was co-winner of the Adirondack Center for Writing's Best Book of Poems for 2007. *The Banquet of Donny & Ari: Scenes from the Opera* is her third poetry collection. One

of the reasons why Naomi's book was successful was because of her change in location; she moved from Quebec to the United States, which was seen as a more lucrative location for successful publishing.

Another author that achieved great success when they moved away from Canada to find a better publishing industry is Morley Callaghan. Callaghan's published his first book *Strange Fugitive* in 1928. In 1929, he signed with a publishing house in New York to produce his first collection of short stories, *A Native Argosy*. He got married and moved to Paris, France where he settled down with his wife to further his writing career. His most commercially acceptable book came in 1934 with "*Such is My Beloved*." He followed with "*They Shall Inherit the Earth*" (1935), "*Now That April's Here*", "*Other Stories*" (1936) and "*More Joy in Heaven*" (1937). These books helped established Callaghan as an important figure in North American literary circles. During the war Callaghan decided to work in the newspaper and radio industries to help support his wife and two sons, since he was not getting enough income on just writing. After the death of three family members, Callaghan once again turned to the redemptive power of literature. In the 1950s and 1960s, Callaghan involved himself in many aspects of writing, including working with the Writer's Union. In 1951, he finally won a Governor-General's Award for "*The Loved and the Lost*". He also wrote "*That Summer in Paris*" (1963), a memoir of his summer in Paris in 1929, which became a huge success and that made him even more popular.

Another Canadian writer who spent most of her career in Paris, France is Mavis Gallant. Gallant is best known for her plays, short stories, novels and essays. She worked at a national film board for 6 years (1944-1950), where she published some of her short stories in both newspapers and magazines. In 1950 Gallant decided to start writing full-time, She moved to Europe with the hope of being able to work as a writer rather than supporting herself with other work, and lived briefly in Spain before settling in Paris, France, where she resided for the remainder of her life. Her first short story that was published internationally was "*Madeline's Birthday*," it was published in 1951 on "The New Yorkers." The magazine further published other stories of hers, which included: "One Morning in June" and "The Picnic." Gibson compiled a collection of previously published stories selected to highlight the Canadian themes and settings present in her work,

and it was titled “*Home Truths: Selected Canadian Stories*”. That volume won the Governor General's Award for English-language fiction in 1981. Gallant was made a foreign honorary member of the American Academic for Art and Letters(1989), she also won the Quebec Writers federation award in 1991, the Giller prize in 1997, and the Matt Cohen prize in 2000. Gallant never moved back to Canada, as she was extremely successful in France, and was globally recognized only when she moved to Paris, France.

The highest amount of migration by Canadian writers took place between 1950s to the 1960s. Writers had to leave Canada to other countries like UK, France, and The United State to get better publishing houses and editors. By 1992 (about 25 years ago) the numbers starts decreasing because more publishing houses were formed, and most of them have the equipment and resources to publish books independently without any international publishing help. The establishment of independent publishing made it easier for new Canadian writers to be successful. Apart from the establishment of publishing houses, there were also some reasons why Canadian publishing improved, such as economic improvement, technology, baby boom, social issues and discrimination. The last two decades of the 20th century were marked by growing social and economic conservatism, a tendency towards fewer gambles in publishing ventures, and a greater reliance on computer technology (e-mail, internet communications, electronic journals such as Frank Davey’s *Swift Current*): A.K. Dewdney's novel *The Planiverse* (1984) provides an early example of computer mathematics at play in fiction. Demographic change meant that the "Baby boom" generation was taking control of social structures by the 1990s. With the increased speed of transport and electronic communication, familiar borders constructed by distance and time zone could be collapsed. Literary exchanges and influences had at least the potential to come from anywhere, instantaneously. Canada's cultural mix was altering yet again and by the year 2000, in an age of globalization, some critics were beginning to spurn textual and historical comment. First Nations writers also started showcasing when the political debate about their injustice began to grow a strong voice, and people were a lot more interested in the topic, which lead to a large number of books been written.

Majority of the writers who left Canada, such as: Morley Callaghan, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler and Lori Lansens ended up returning to Canada after several success and award. One author mentioned earlier that never moved back to Canada till her death in 2014 is Mavis Gallant. Majority of Canadian writers who migrated to Europe or the US came back due to the fact that they can now publish their books from anywhere in the world because of the vast amount of technology available to our disposal today.

This section would concentrate on award won by three authors who migrated from Canada. First, Naomi Guttman, she has won several award over the years, her first and most popular award came in 1991 when she won the A.M Klein award, which is a Quebec writers federation award a series of Canadian literary awards, presented annually by the Quebec writers federation to the best works of literature in English by writers from Quebec. They were known from 1988 to 1998 as the QSPELL Awards. Was named best poetry book of 2007 by the Adirondack Center for Writing in June 2008. Secondly, Morley Callaghan who won the Governor general's literary award for English-Language fiction in 1951, this is a Canadian literary award that annually recognizes one Canadian writer for a fiction book written in English, and it is one of Canada's prestigious award. Finally, Mavis Gallant, In 1981 she won the Governor general's literary award for English-Language fiction. She also won The New York Times best book of the year, followed by the, followed by Rea award for best short story in 2002, an annual award given to a living American or Canadian author chosen for unusually significant contributions to short story fiction. Finally, before she passed away she won PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature an award given biannually by the PEN American Center to writers, principally novelists, whose works evoke to some measure Nabokov's brilliant.

Authors Who Stay in Canada: Experiences and Results

Although there is fair reason for local Canadian talent to move away from the country to find bigger and better success, we can still vouch for many authors who have decided to stay and represent the country from within. For one, not all authors write solely for profit, but also for passion. For many people working in

artistic fields, a sense of nationalism can play a large part in the way that they produce and promote their work.

For Lawrence Hill, Canadian author best known for writing ‘The Book of Negroes’, speaks about his personal connection to the multiculturalism of Canada’s residents. Coming from a biracial family from the US, Hill often writes and talks about his identity as a Canadian, and has embarked on many opportunities to share his own experiences to others in and outside of the country. Although he lived and travelled across the world, he continues to proudly identify as Canadian.

Another great author who has proudly helped build Canada’s literary identity is Yann Martel, author of ‘Life of Pi’- novel which has famously been turned into a movie. He was born in Spain, and lived in many countries around the world, yet his home is Canada. In a radio interview, he boldly criticized Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, for not reading books, let alone Canadian literature, even after mailing 101 books to the Prime Minister in hopes of having him read just one. He says “I’m Canadian — that’s the only passport I have. I’m Canadian.” (Canadian Writers Abroad).

Both these authors have established great success as writers, and have also continued to recognize their Canadian identity in their work. Canada’s multiculturalism brings together authentic cultures and stories from all over the world, and its literature reflects this diversity. Although Hill and Martel spent a lot of time travelling and living in many parts of the world, they both call Canada home.

Cultivating Proud Canadian Authors and Literature

In the 1970s, the publishing industry saw a growing national self-awareness in Canada, which translated into a larger audience for fictitious and nonfiction books. These changes lead to the government creating forms of grants to give incentive to writers to create more written works.

For example, The Writer’s Trust reaches out to support Canadian writers which give writers the financial aid and tools to help master their craft. They offer a number of grants that allow writers in specific genres to get a chance in finding

help. The Writers' Trust of Canada's Matt Cohen Prize recognizes a lifetime of distinguished work by a Canadian writer, working in poetry or prose in either French or English. This one is offered to all writers and can be granted up to \$20,000 per year, one of the larger awards for authors. In addition, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and The Writers' Trust of Canada's Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing both offer up to \$15,000 to writers in their respective fields.

As a result, writers began to return back to Canada and new ones showed up within the nation to pursue writing as a career. This led to the creation of the Canadian Writers Union because the creators behind it believed that it would help protect the publishing industry within the nation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we ask the question: "Is the Canadian literary industry a strong and appealing place for an aspiring author to build his or her career?" Canada's literary scene is flourishing with aspiring authors, and although small, this country holds rich opportunity and experience for its residents. The UK and US will always be publishing powerhouses that offer incredible resources that are fit for most writers, but not all. Today, Canadian writers are making a name for the country and building a strong reputation for the local talent. In our paper, we outlined the comparison between Canada's publishing industry and ones located in the US and UK, the history of the publishing industry itself within Canada, and went on to outline examples and results of authors that have either stayed to pursue writing locally, or went abroad to pursue the industry internationally. Through the Canadian publishing industry's journey, the paper was able to delve deeper into what enticed some authors to stay, and others to leave, and the results that stemmed from these decisions.

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