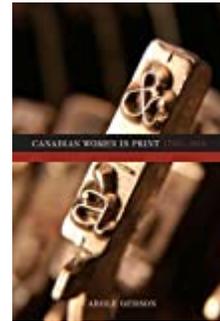




**Carole Gerson.** *Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010. xvi + 279 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55458-220-4; \$38.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55458-304-1.



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**Published on** H-Canada (July, 2014)

**Commissioned by** Jane Nicholas (University of Waterloo/St. Jerome's)

## Kathryn Carter on *Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918*

Anyone who knows of Carole Gerson's outstanding scholarship on early Canadian women's writing and early Canadian print culture might have hoped that she would distill and download her lifetime of information and research into one comprehensive tome. Well, she did, and this is the book, although I suspect she could fill another several hundred pages with the details that she has collected throughout her research career. Some highlights of her career include a comprehensive monograph on the life of Pauline Johnson (*Paddling Her Own Canoe* [2002]); extensive editing and collecting of early Canadian poetry, sketches, short stories, and journalism in multiple publications; contributions to the ongoing History of the Book in Canada project; and a database that she created at Simon Fraser University (her professional home) called Canada's Early Women Writers.[1] This database is currently being incorporated into the ambitious digital humanities undertaking called CWRC (Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory). She is highly qualified to tell this story of women in print before 1918.

*Canadian Women in Print* is primarily a literary history, and because Gerson has such a strong command of her material, the highly detailed narrative of women writers and their entrance into print unfolds effortlessly. All the usual suspects are here: she recounts the stories of Anna Jameson, Susanna Moodie, Rosanna Leprohon, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Marie de l'Incarnation, Agnes Maul Machar, and others. All the usual contours of that important story—the story of women's emergence into the world of publishing in Canada—are also here: women who gained a foothold in journalism; intrepid women travelers; women who negotiated their ways through British and American publishing houses by unburdening their works of Canadian references; and women who used maternal feminism or the new woman to leverage careers and disseminate their ideas in the days before World War I. However, she also includes the stories of those who are not as well represented in the usual histories of early Canadian women's writing. A novel like Lottie McAlister's *Clipped Wings* (1899) may have escaped sustained scrutiny so far because it is a bit anoma-

lous, a work of locally produced suffrage fiction that Gerson claims is rare for 1899. The interweaving of temperance, suffrage, and women's need for broader horizons with other areas of social reform in this novel indicate that it would surely bear more scholarly attention (p. 148). Her coverage of the canonical is supplemented nicely by the not-as-well-known.

In this vein, Gerson draws attention to authors who did not make writing the sole purpose of their lives like the rarely mentioned Nina Moore Jamieson, who wrote to raise money for charitable causes; the women who wrote cookbooks as fundraisers; or the unusual memoir (*Narrative of the Shipwreck and Sufferings of Miss Ann Saunders* [1827]) that resulted when Ann Saunders survived a shipwreck near Liverpool in 1826 only to find herself among a group who resorted to cannibalizing the dead (including Saunders's fiancé). Gerson does not consider, though she could, how a memoir like Saunders's complicates the category of writing in Canada. Saunders was a native of Liverpool, on a voyage from Liverpool to St. Johns, New Brunswick, and published the account in Providence, Rhode Island, with a note verifying the origins of the account from the clerk of the District of Massachusetts. Is it curious that this account should find its way into what Gerson carefully words as "Canada's print heritage" (p. 30). Perhaps not, given its location within the archival website Early Canadiana Online.[2] However, this was a British woman who wrote near a Canadian shore who returned to England and published the book in the United States. Any interstices between a publishing history and "print heritage" into which a fervently nationalist argument might stumble and falter are the topic for another book, but the case of Saunders makes it clear that Gerson's understanding of our "print heritage" is liberal, and I think stronger for being inclusive.

The organization of the book is roughly chronological with some thematic subcategories. She begins in the murky haze of the pre-1850 period when publishing in Canada was in its infancy, represented primarily by the very few publishing houses established in Montreal or Toronto, and then she traces the growth of markets for women writers (both in Canada and abroad), who began entering such professions as journalism during the 1870s. She examines, by way of "collage," as she says, some of the case studies and some of the motivations that induced women to get involved in writing and publishing. Her description of the book as collage helps to explain why the book "arranges many separate snapshots of specific individuals and scenes of writing in order to present larger

composite stories" (p. xiii). Indeed, the book is supplemented with the kind of iconic snapshots that would be an ideal introduction to a new researcher in this field. The collage strategy, echoing the best kind of nineteenth-century scrapbook, makes the book very readable and highly digestible. Gerson also points out that there can be no definitive historical narrative, anyway, because accidents of circumstance too often determined what kind of literary creations were made and which manuscripts made it to print; we may have only a partial record of the kinds of writing activities happening in the pre-1918 period.

The final chapter before the conclusion is devoted to writers of race, such as Pauline Johnson, Mary Ann Shadd, Winnifred Eaton, and Onoto Watanna. Gerson points out, quite rightly, the paradoxical position in which these women found themselves: that "marginality could be advantageous for both author and publisher when it dovetailed with the majority culture's desire for unthreatening novelty" (p. 192). And because this book is primarily historical, she does little more than recount the kinds of difficulties faced by these women while cataloguing some other women worth studying, such as Martha Douglas Harris, Jane Schoolcraft, and Lydia Campbell. Gerson shows that for many of these women, like Eaton, their scholarly reception was "overdetermined by race" (p. 190), so I am unclear about how this notion is in any way challenged by grouping them together here within a chapter on race with fairly scant attention to how those women negotiated racialized positions within their writing. The chapter title "Addressing the Margins of Race" further spatializes the location of these women writers in a troubling way, especially given Gerson's stated reluctance to use "mapping" as a metaphor to organize this historical overview (p. xii). This is a small detraction from a book that is in every other way excellent.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a generation of scholars paved the way for rich investigations into women's writing in Canada. Veronica Strong Boag, Misao Dean, Randi Warne, Cathy Cavanaugh, Charlotte Gray, Margaret Conrad, Susan Jackel, D. M. R. Bentley, Uma Parameswaran, Barbara Goddard, Smaro Kamboureli, Gwendolyn Davies, Michael Peterman, Marlene Kadar, Constance Rooke, Rosemary Sullivan, and others drew our attention to the legacy left by earlier women writers in Canada. Gerson's own scholarship emerged from this fruitful period, and her first important scholarship was published in 1989, *A Purer Taste*. Her most recent work here is nothing less than the definitive, condensed intro-

duction to the field. Her extensive notes and bibliography will lead readers to more recent scholars of Canadian women writers, such as Janice Fiamengo, Heather Murray, Linda Quirk, Dean Irvine, Nick Mount, George Eliot Clarke, Wendy Roy, and others. In short, this historical overview by Gerson should be considered the most trustworthy reference work for any scholar wanting a concise and correct introduction to the field of early Canadian women's writing. Gerson's work has been nothing less than foundational, and here she solidifies again the importance of women's writing in Canada, and her role as

its outstanding historian.

#### Notes

[1]. Canada's Early Women Writers, <http://cufts2.lib.sfu.ca/CRDB4/BVAS/resource/5724>.

[2]. Ann Saunders, *Narrative of the Shipwreck and Sufferings of Miss Ann Saunders*, Early Canadiana Online, [http://ebooks.library.ualberta.ca/local/cihm\\_40276](http://ebooks.library.ualberta.ca/local/cihm_40276).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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**Citation:** Kathryn Carter. Review of Gerson, Carole, *Canadian Women in Print, 1750-1918*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. July, 2014.

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