Mary Leslie: The Journey of A Lost Canadian Author

“I am sorry I cannot be what you would wish me, a good, quiet, domestic character (and I speak of such with all reassurances) but I would prefer being an evergreen to an English rose” (Leslie, 1862)

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Abstract:

This paper examines the life of a Canadian writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries named Mary Leslie who experienced moderate success as an author. Despite her numerous efforts to write and publish stories, she failed to gain a public readership and was almost entirely forgotten by history. Her single novel is impossible to find and is ignored by both literary and Canadian historians alike in spite of its unique depiction of mid-nineteenth century rural Ontario and its unconventional perspective of class, gender, and romance of her time. This paper follows Leslie’s transatlantic journey within the literary world to provide a perspective on the experiences of Canadian women, their barriers, and areas of opportunity that could have afforded them success. By drawing heavily on the analysis of archival material, including correspondence, financial records, published and unpublished manuscripts, a vibrant woman with a passion for storytelling is revealed.

Keywords:

writer, literary, archival records, book history, publishing

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Introduction

Mary Leslie (1842-1920) was a Canadian writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who experienced moderate success as an author. A semblance of Leslie's life is preserved in her fonds within the Archives of Ontario. In exploring her numerous letters, drafted manuscripts, and family papers, a depiction of a vibrant woman, who was an active member of her community and held a passion for storytelling, is revealed. Although she never gained any distinction for her works, Leslie features as an example of one of the many Canadians attempting to make their living by writing. This paper will examine Leslie's experiences through her campaign to entice publishers, her use of literary agents and mentors, and her ability to sell her own books. Additionally, this paper will demonstrate how the literary world Leslie navigated existed transnationally, as she pursued her career not only in Canada but equally in England and the United States of America.

Who is Mary Leslie?

Apart from records held at the Archives of Ontario and a handful of pieces that she managed to publish, Leslie is essentially undetectable throughout Canadian history¹. Born in Guelph Township of Wellington County in 1842 to a relatively well-off family, Leslie was accustomed to a level of comfort uncommon to her area². She maintained close relationships to her parents, Elizabeth Griffin (1800-1885) and John Thomas Leslie (1794-1871), as well as her older sister, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Clarke (1840-1917). Perhaps a result of this support, Leslie never married and chose instead to devote her life to pursuing various vocations that demonstrated her passion for storytelling. The financial security and personal connections provided by her familial background also allowed her to travel internationally in attempts to establish herself as an author. However, Leslie ultimately made Southern Ontario her primary residence, where she inhabited the areas of Belwood, Elora, Rockwood, and Toronto. Unfortunately, questionable financial decisions and

1 The information pertaining to Leslie's life depicted in this paper was ascertained through extensive research conducted within Mary Leslie fonds at the Archives of Ontario.

2 This assumption is based on the few accounts that remain from people who had connections to Leslie and her family. In the 1830s, Leslie's father, John Thomas Leslie, came to Canada independently wealthy and purchased a plot of land. The Leslie's immigrated from the more developed areas of England and appeared to the inhabitants of Wellington County as "rather aristocratic, not money-makers" based on the account of W. M. Grant who personally knew Leslie (1942). Thus, the Leslies lived quite comfortably in comparison with most rural Canadians in their area. According to Patricia Mestern, who knew of Leslie through her grandmother, "from the start, village residents and the Leslie family had had an uneasy relationship" based on what they perceived as the Leslie's exhibiting their "upper-class status" (2004, p. 41).

poor economic times eventually resulted in the loss of her family home, which had been left to her as a means of security. This financial instability characterized the remainder of her life, as she was required to support herself and other women she had close connections to, including her sister.³ In addition to her writing, Leslie was a devoted artist of painting and sketching, often exchanging lessons and pictures for goods and services to supplement her income. She was also an active member of her community, making an effort to engage in matters that she believed to be important. Leslie died in Toronto from influenza on March 1, 1920.

Barriers in Canadian Publishing

Leslie was writing and seeking publication from the early 1860s until her death in 1920. During this period, she published three books and numerous short stories for a variety of periodicals. Although Leslie failed to establish herself as a prominent author of her time, a survey of Canadian book history reveals that this period was a trying time for English Canadian writers (Cambron & Gerson, 2005; Gerson, 2009; Gerson, 2010; Golick, 2005; Mount, 2005; Parker, 2005). Nicholas J. Mount, a Canadian literature scholar identifies multiple barriers that existed within the Canadian literary world which prevented writers from establishing careers, such as the publishing industry's preference for English and American authors, poor copyright protections, and higher rates for magazine postage within the country (2005, 12). Not only was the Canadian literary market unfavourable to Canadians, but the desired genre was experiencing a cultural shift. Mount discusses how literature at this time was a "highly diverse product of a constantly changing set of different artistic communities" (2005, p. 13). Andrea Austin suggests a reason for this reconfiguration was due to Canadians attempting to "[adapt] Old World patterns to New World settings" (1995, p. 36). Moreover, Carole Gerson discusses how many authors found Canada to be uninterested in reading and buying books (2009, p. 8). Mount speaks to this belief in which Canadian writers deemed their national readership to be "too preoccupied with economic progress to care about imaginative literature—about anything but 'wheat, railroads and politics'" (2005, p. 12). This led to conflict on many fronts, preventing the success of several authors and their original works.

Despite the barriers Canadians faced, authorship was still a possible career option. Micheline Cambron and Gerson claim that the 1880s "mark a threshold in the evolution of authorship

³ Elizabeth Leslie married late in life at the age of 51 to a soldier, Charles Anthony Clarke (1830-1897). It was a relatively short and hard coupling as Charles spent most of his time recuperating from an unspecified injury in an American hospital. During their brief marriage, the couple resided with Leslie at the family homestead.

as a valuable and viable occupation” (2005, p. 120). They indicate that growing populations, increased access to education, and more time available for recreation were contributing factors to “a larger potential readership at home and abroad” (Cambron and Gerson, 2005, p. 127). This socio-economic context, coupled with new technological advances ultimately allowed for the cheaper production of mass-market magazines and books, which enabled people to enjoy greater access to literature (Cambron and Gerson, 2005, p. 127). Additionally, this period was influenced by the Canadian Confederation which Austin identifies as a catalyst for the government’s awareness of its nation’s literary culture and “fostered a surge of literature dedicated to exploring the viability of Canada as a setting for fiction” (1995, p. 36). Within this context, Leslie attempted to launch her literary career.

Leslie’s Experience in Canadian Publishing

Leslie’s debut novel in 1878, *The Cromaboo Mail Carrier* (CMC)⁴, was met with swift backlash by locals and was removed from circulation. Published after her unsuccessful attempts to secure a British publisher, Leslie turned her attention to literary individuals closer to home, perhaps hoping that a publication would invite more favourable outcomes. Instead, this immediate failure in the beginning of her career was a characterization that followed Leslie for the rest of her life. In obtaining publication for her novel, Leslie sold her copyright to Guelph printer Joseph Hacking (Golick, 2010, p. 124). Based on the fervor Leslie invoked regarding her writing, it is unlikely that she would have supported CMC’s withdrawal. But as she sold her rights to Hacking, it can be surmised that he made the decision in order to protect his reputation.

Joseph Hacking

According to George L. Parker, British authors “assigned their ‘copyright’ to publishers in return for either an outright payment or a split of the profits” in adherence to their copyright laws of 1709 and 1842 (2005, p. 148). As a former colony of the British Empire that closely observed the behaviour of British authors, Parker explains how colonial writers followed this practice as their domestic copyrights “only protected them locally” (2005, p. 148). In her dissertation on bookbinding, Greta Golick suspects that Hacking obtained the copyright to CMC in order to cover the costs of printing and to provide Leslie with an immediate return on her book (2010, p. 124). This belief is reinforced by a receipt from Guelph bookbinder, F. Trollope Chapman, who records Leslie ordering one hundred books to be bound at her own expense (November 28, 1878).

4 CMC is an unconventional love story between a 30 year old spinster and an 18 year old man from the lower class. The story ends with the scandalous couple living together, but not married.

As the book was immediately pulled from circulation, Leslie and Hacking made no gains from its publication. According to Golick, this troubled deal is in line with Hacking's professional history as she details his poor business decisions, such as freely giving credit and endorsing friends (2010, p. 157). While Leslie would not have been further financially compensated, the presence of her novel and its possible success would have facilitated her efforts to establish herself as an author by providing her with a public readership that could have enticed other publishers. Despite Hacking possibly removing CMC from circulation, he and Leslie continued their professional relationship. Hacking founded "The Clifford Arrow" in 1878 and printed her serial stories, including *David Jone's Locker* in 1879 and *Absolutely Her Own Mistress* in 1881 (Knight, 2016, p. xxviii).

Although Leslie spent a considerable amount of time and energy focusing her attention on British publishers, it is in Canada that Leslie published all three of her books. Her letters demonstrate an engagement with various literary figures and prominent publishing houses of her time as she continued to promote CMC and various unknown manuscripts. Leslie details her endeavours to secure a publisher to her sister in many letters, but all follow a similar pattern of disappointment in which a literary figure expresses their interest while failing to offer any substantial support. In one letter, she discusses her attempts at securing "Clark & Co"⁵ who turned her away due to a fire, and details her discussion with a Mr. Winston, who appeared to offer assistance in regards to one of her manuscripts while also expressing "his difficulties" (Leslie)⁶. Additionally, Leslie maintained constant connections with various publishing companies in Canada, including, but not limited to, "The Home Journal Toronto,"⁷ "The MacLean's Magazine,"⁸ as well as prominent individuals like T. A. Browne, president of "The Citizen," "The Journal," and "The Montreal Star," as well as New Brunswick publisher, R. A. H. Morrow.

William Briggs

One individual that stands out as a testament to Leslie's endeavours is William Briggs, publisher of the Methodist Book and Publishing House (MB & PH), one of the largest publishing companies of Canadian manuscripts at the time (Garrick, 2005, p. 190). Dana Garrick speaks to the influence of MB & PH on the Canadian literary market and how its operations permeated the publishing industry, not only as a leader in publishing, but through their executives who often es-

5 Possibly referring to Copp, Clark and Co., a Canadian educational publisher.

6 Emphasis included in the text was provided by Leslie. Similarly, any spelling or grammar mistakes are included as founded within her fonds.

7 Possibly referring to the "Canadian Home Journal" a woman's magazine published from 1905-1958.

8 A Canadian news magazine that published its first issue in 1905 and still in operations today.

established their own publishing companies (2005, p. 452). Of particular significance to Leslie, the MB & PH rose to prominence in publishing textbooks and original Canadian manuscripts (Garrick 2005, 179). It is through Briggs that Leslie ensured the publications of her two final books: *Rhymes of the Kings and Queens of England* (Rhymes) in 1896, and *Historical Sketches of Scotland in Prose and Verse in One Volume* (Historical Sketches) in 1905. Both Rhymes and Historical Sketches are markedly different from CMC in terms of genre and purpose. They read closer to non-fiction, narrating the histories of England and Scotland, and demonstrate her desire to educate young people. According to Golick, Leslie had intended Rhymes to be chosen as a textbook for Ontario schools (2010, p. 127). However, Garrick speaks to the highly competitive industry that existed at the time, engendered by a decision from the Minister of Education in 1884 to only authorize one series of textbooks, offering a ten-year exclusive contract with one publisher (2005, p. 183). By the beginning of the 1890s, three publishing companies, including MB & PH, dominated the “textbook trade” with their “aggressive business practices” (Garrick, 2005, p. 182). Despite her works never being selected as textbooks for the province, Briggs would have entertained Leslie’s manuscripts as potentially providing “steady profits” for his business (Garrick, 2005, p. 190). However, the relationship does not appear to have been a success as Leslie did not gain a wide readership with Rhymes, and Historical Sketches was funded entirely by her own means (Leslie, 1910)⁹. Although these two publications fared better than her first by actually circulating throughout Canada, they did not propel Leslie’s writing career to the level she expected.

Transatlantic Publishing

Leslie actively pursued international publishers the entirety of her career. She operated within the transnational literary market of England and America, as well as her home country of Canada. According to Gerson, this was common behaviour for English Canadian writers “with regard to the content of their texts, the location of their publishers, their desire for audience, and their own travels and domiciles” (2009, p. 1-2). In comparison to their British and American counterparts, Canadian writers were more likely to migrate for their careers, which Gerson claims is a reflection of the “instability” felt by English-Canadian writers within their native literary market (2009, p. 2). Mount attests to this “literary exodus,” claiming it as the response to the hardships writers faced in Canada to make their living as an author (2005, p. 6-8). With their close geo-

9 Notably, Briggs’ name is only attached to Rhymes, which was also published through C.W. Coates in Montreal and S.F. Huestis in Halifax. In comparison, Historical Sketches does not include the name of any publisher or publishing company. Although it is unclear how the latter came to be published, it is inferred in her letters that Leslie used this connection and the “partial success” of Rhymes to enable the publication of Historical Sketches.

graphic and social ties to the south, the United States, who possessed “burgeoning literary networks and publishing industries,” was often the destination of Canadian writers (Gerson, 2009, p. 5). Gerson discusses how Canadian literary history has been “traditionally shaped as a saga of beleaguered survival on the margins of imperial centres” which provides some context to the known difficulties in establishing a literary career in Canada (Gerson, 2009, p. 1). Although her first story was published in Guelph, Leslie began her foray in the literary world in England, as outlined by one of the biggest sections of correspondence in her fonds.

British Publishing

Despite the greater opportunities afforded by the British literary markets, Leslie struggled to gain a publisher in England¹⁰. According to her letters, Leslie already had connections in London in the form of an editor. In a letter to her father, Leslie wrote “my chief object was to copy stories already written, and have a personal interview with the editor” (August 6, 1867)¹¹. This letter referred to the numerous hardships Leslie endured in attempting to maintain a connection overseas, but also demonstrates the privilege she enjoyed from being part of a family that supported her with a network and funds (August 6, 1867). Notwithstanding this initial prospect, Leslie did not manage to secure a publication, and a year later she wrote home, “I have made no engagement with any publisher for the sale of the book, and I am quite uncertain about the success of it” (January 12, 1868). Although she did not achieve the results she desired, this venture was not a waste of time as she made several connections and obtained feedback from literary professionals. In one letter she reports, “it was first read by a certain Mr. Archibald who [dammed] it with faint praise, and I afterwards sent it to the editor of the Cornhill who read it and wrote me a long letter of kindly advice, and praised the ‘fresh and vivid style’ in which it was written, but declined it” (Leslie, May 31, 1868).

William Leslie

Leslie’s second attempt to gain publication in England was vastly different from her first venture into the British market. This was a result of the fact that she remained in Canada and used

¹⁰ Leslie travelled England from 1867-1868 to visit family. Fortunately, Leslie repeatedly wrote long letters home to her parents during this period, often mere days apart, providing a unique and detailed snapshot into her experiences in a foreign country. According to her letters, she was sent by her family to improve her failing health. While documenting her recovery, Leslie also discussed the ulterior motives for her travels, to connect with British publishers and potentially a chance for literary fame.

¹¹ Her emphasis

her uncle, William Leslie, to market CMC on her behalf as a pseudo agent.¹² He wrote frequently to Leslie detailing his experiences of shopping her manuscript around to numerous publishing houses, including “Quarterly, Westminster & Edinburgh,” and obtaining audiences with select editors from companies such as “E. Globe,” to some success (William Leslie, January 22, 1879). Throughout his letters, William Leslie referred to British editors taking particular issue with Leslie’s insistence on maintaining her novel as single volumes. Smith Elder & Co.¹³ specifically cited her adherence to one volume novels as the reason that “[has] prevented our undertaking to republish the work in England” (December 5, 1878)¹⁴. William Leslie not only acted on Leslie’s behalf, but provided advice on her writing and how to move forward with different publishers. Although he was straightforward with Leslie about his lack of literary know-how, claiming his opinion was “not of much value I fear in any case,” Leslie highly regarded his judgement (William Leslie, June 23, 1880). Despite the vigor in which he attempted to gain her a publisher, William Leslie failed in his mission.

American Publishing

In addition to her endeavours in England, Leslie frequented New York City to entice publishers and gain literary connections. According to Mount, many Canadian writers in the 1880s and 1890s found jobs in American publishing companies and regularly published their pieces in the periodicals of Boston, New York, or Philadelphia (2005, p. 6). Based on her letters home, Leslie made several trips to New York around the turn of the century, and maintained contact with several publishing houses and literary figures, including, F. Tennyson Neely, a New York publisher, “The Hearst Syndicate,”¹⁵ and “People’s Magazine.” In America, Leslie predominantly pursued short stories over longer text. According to Mount, this is reflective of periodicals existing as the dominant medium in America, specifically New York (2005, 10). Apart from countless manuscripts in various states of completion found in her fonds, it is uncertain as to what success Leslie found in American publishers since no records of her being published remains. It is possible that

12 William Leslie was her paternal uncle and made a living as an engraver in London. Within Leslie’s entire family, her uncle stands out as one of the few who supported her literary career and actively assisted her endeavours in the literary world. That being said, her family and friends were aware of her literary aspirations and did encourage them on numerous occasions. This is most evident in her father sending her to London while fully aware of her underlying motive to meet editors and obtain feedback on her writing.

13 Smith Elder & Co. was a British publishing company that published works of notable authors, including Charlotte Brontë, Charles Darwin, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

14 Currently defunct British publishing company, notable authors include Charlotte Brontë, Charles Darwin, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

15 A print syndication, still in business today, that began operations in 1895.

another story credited to Leslie, *Battle of Worcester* could have been published in the States as letters exist between her and American publishers with regard to this story. Mount also speaks to the difficulties that Canadians operating in America experienced, characterizing its literary market as “the kind of prosperity that attracts many but rewards few and remembers even fewer” (2005, p. 12). Additionally, publishing in America brought its own risks to copyright as the United States did not follow international copyright regulations until 1901 (Gerson, 5). Leslie’s work, like her fellow Canadians, could potentially be “lost in the unsigned columns of the city’s dailies and weekend ‘specials’” (Mount, 2005, p. 12).

Leslie’s Barriers

The decisions Leslie made regarding her literary career added additional barriers that potentially prevented her work from reaching a wider audience and achieving the level of success she may have desired. While she endeavoured to support herself as an author, she repeatedly made choices about her work that jeopardized this possibility. She demonstrated the ability to reach out to others for help, but repeatedly ignored their advice. Faced with an increasingly unstable financial situation, Leslie would often enter high risk arrangements that would rarely be profitable. Leslie exhibits this behaviour while navigating every aspect of the literary world.

Financial Strain

Although Leslie’s financial situation was not the reason for her continued efforts to establish herself as an author, it did factor into the decisions she made and how she approached the literary market¹⁶. Her desire to support herself and others featured heavily in whether she viewed her efforts to be successful.¹⁷ This behaviour is most notable in the circumstances surrounding the publications of *Rhymes* and *Historical Sketches*. Both were published with the assistance of her own capital. In order to publish *Rhymes*, Leslie borrowed \$100 with the intent to absolve her debt by selling the book for \$1 per volume (1897). One can assume that her strategy was to garner enough attention that would result in more favourable relationships with publishing houses. This also demonstrates how Leslie viewed her writing as an investment that could pay for itself based on her talent and hard work, with the ability to maintain her living as a marker for success. How-

¹⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, the Leslie family fortune was virtually gone due to the death of her parents, the recession of the 1870s and 1880s, and poor financial decisions, resulting in Leslie facing unexpected hardships.

¹⁷ Leslie’s career not only supported herself, but her sister, Elizabeth Leslie, whose short marriage to an invalid American soldier failed to provide for her during and after his death. Letters between the sisters indicate a collective effort to monetize Leslie’s work in any way possible.

ever, her letters depict a more bleak reality in which she barely manages to survive on this plan. Regardless, she was resolved to persevere and committed to publishing *Historical Sketches* entirely out of pocket. Her pride is apparent in a letter to “Putnam & Sons”¹⁸ when she states that she managed to support herself from the funds gained from selling *Historical Sketches* through subscription, as she wrote “on this book I have lived and paid rent for four year”¹⁹ (January 25, 1910).

Notwithstanding Leslie’s inability to secure a publisher that would pay for publishing and promoting her works, she refused to give up her aspirations and crafted her own success through personally selling her books. Golick examines how people in rural communities, in particular those isolated by distance, were able to buy books through the mail or “directly from a peddler or an itinerant agent” (2005, p. 210). Leslie attempted to engage with this market by canvassing the countryside, selling subscriptions to her works. While bookstores did exist at this time, Leslie makes no mention of whether her books appeared in these institutions beyond CMC’s initial failure (Golick, 2005, p. 210). According to Parker, subscription houses existed in Guelph, along with “hired travelling agents,” who promoted “books to rural readers at discounts of 35 to 50 per cent” (Parker, 2005, p. 21). This development was due to the economic recession of the 1870s and 1880s that witnessed a steep decline in original book publishing which engendered the rise of subscription publishing (Parker, 2005, p. 21). However, Gerson asserts that this undertaking “rarely yielded the envisioned profits,” thus revealing the common hardships novice authors faced when attempting to sell through subscriptions (2009, p. 5). She provides Catharine Parr Traill as an example of a successful author who struggled to make an income off of subscription books. Gerson cites the reason for Traill’s success being due to family inheritance and generous gifts from the community (2009, p. 5). Leslie demonstrates timid optimism for this venture when she wrote to her sister, “I don’t know how I will pan out with the money. Though every day I sell something, and hear of more subscribers, or some one I ought to see” (March 25, 1909).

Compensation

A contributing factor to Leslie’s struggle to gain a publisher was due in part to her desire for compensation.²⁰ According to her uncle, “the managers of periodicals don’t care to look at [a] manuscript if any pay is wanted” by women writers (William Leslie, November 3, 1880). One

18 Possibly G. P. Putnam’s Sons, American book publisher and imprint of the Penguin Group.

19 Her emphasis.

20 Despite her family’s financial security, the issue of money was present throughout Leslie’s funds. Leslie demonstrated a realistic level of awareness of the family’s income which contributed to her decisions in working with publishers. While it is apparent that Leslie wrote to fill a passion for telling tales, she was not ignorant to the possible financial compensation her literary aspirations could serve the family.

editor demonstrated this trend to William Leslie who reported back to Leslie, “he said most of the contributors were ladies, many writing more for amusement, he did not consider as a rule that they made a pound a week by their writings” (January 22, 1879). However, Leslie believed that literature was “skilled labor” in which “the authors pay should surely be more than I should pay a scrub lady, a char woman or had-man receives for a day’s work” (October 28).²¹ Moreover, this barrier was compounded by the fact that Hacking owned the copyright of CMC and was only willing to sell the rights to it for \$80 to \$100, a steep price for the time as William recounted one editor had declared that it “was far more than they were in the habit of paying” (William Leslie, January 22, 1879). Although this price was not set by Leslie, it contributed to her portrayal of being a costly investment. If Leslie had considered lowering the value that she believed her work garnered, for the sake of publication, she may have managed to see more of her work published which could have potentially resulted in more profitable arrangements.

Genre

Another aspect that could have hampered Leslie’s chances of gaining a publisher was her commitment to genre, theme, and structure that she regarded as respectable writing and which she rarely strayed from throughout her career. This is most evident in CMC as its content was the sole reason for its premature removal. Inspired by her own community, the novel was a vaguely camouflaged depiction of the people in her area and they, coincidentally, were not happy with their portrayal.²² Despite this experience, Leslie refused to change her content. In a letter to “MacClean’s Magazine,” Leslie provided some insights into her creative processes as she wrote “as for “selecting” a theme, I never did it in my life, ever tried till recently. Something interest or amuse me, possess my thought for the time, and I jot it down on paper. After a week or two, copy and correct it, or put it into the fire.”²³ In another letter, she described her own rules of literature that she adhered to and “never [deviated] from” as she stressed “I will not write down to the public taste or conform to a lowland and than that I believe in for the stake of popularity or money” (Leslie). This standard is supported by the few times she deviated from her own guidelines to appease the demands from publishers which she documents extensively in her letters. In one letter, she details her experience conforming to the requirements of “McClure Newspaper Syndicate” that called for a story that would possess “no religion in them...no politics, nothing sentimental not

21 Her emphasis.

22 In response, it is believed that the residents threatened a lawsuit against Leslie and Hacking. While there is no record of such a lawsuit existing today, the novel was removed from circulation (Mestern 2004, 41).

23 Her emphasis.

to exceed a certain number of words 5 dollars each - the scene must be in the States” (Leslie)²⁴. After adhering to their requirements, and entertaining numerous “compliments,” her writing was ultimately rejected (Leslie). In conjecture, these decisions Leslie made regarding content made it difficult for her to flourish into a well-known and respected author.

This refusal to conform to popular writing trends of her time is exemplified in her rejection of sensationalism as a popular genre. According to Alberto Gabriele, a scholar of Victorian print culture, the “sensational novel” was made popular in the 1860s as a genre that “developed through stories of mysterious disappearances, bigamy, murder, and suspicions of criminal behavior” (2018, p. 150-165). In comparison, CMC demonstrated a detailed and mundane observation of rural Canadian life and, while the ending proved shocking, it did not adhere to the shock value deemed acceptable in sensationalism. According to Gerson, CMC received consideration “for its anti-romantic representation of social behaviour,” but calls attention to how it was the “[exception] to the normal practice of nineteenth-century Canadian fiction writers, who tended to handle social criticism with kid gloves” (2010, p. 160). This is corroborated by the response CMC generated from publishers. The popular British publishing company, Smith Elder & Co., wrote to Leslie, that CMC “exhibits considerable power as well as literary ability, but we agree with your friends that it is, in parts, a little too outspoken” (December 5, 1878). Additionally, her book managed to be included in “The Westminster Review,” a quarterly British publication, but they wrote “we are doubtful whether his story will be popular in England. In Canada, we should imagine it might be a success” (1879, p. 583). Leslie was aware of this issue but did not grasp the importance of adhering to the desires of the readership. She was informed by one editor that sensational novel writing “was the one literature in which a new beginner could succeed immediately and make money” (September 17, 1867). However, she expressed that “it was a class of literature I detested from the bottom of my breast” and refused to incorporate sensational elements into her work, despite promises of his assistance in return (Leslie, September 17, 1867). Her distaste towards the literature is apparent as she called out Mary Elizabeth Braddon, a “successful and prolific author of popular sensation fiction” (Gabriele, 2018, p. 150) as a “disgrace to woman kind” (Leslie, September 17, 1867). These refusals to conform made Leslie’s literary career much more difficult, but also contributes to the importance of her as a historical Canadian author.

Literary Agents

Despite Leslie’s resistance to criticism regarding the context of her work, she was not scared to reach out for help. Her fonds demonstrates numerous connections she made to other in-

24 The McClure Newspaper Syndicate was an American newspaper syndicate from 1884-1952.
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dividuals in the literary world throughout her life. Leslie's experience using her uncle as an agent demonstrated to her the benefits that could be gained with using non-traditional networks in an attempt to market her works overseas. After her uncle's death, Leslie graduated to the professional literary agents of "The 1908 Empire Agency Literary & Dramatic" who endeavoured on her behalf to gain English publishers to no fruition (September 28, 1916). According to Gerson, agents were instrumental in penetrating the "biting critiques of English society and literary culture" and this "new figure" was helpful in navigating "the global literary field" (2009, p. 8). This permitted a new chapter in Leslie's venture into the world of having works published. However, despite their expressed interest in her work, "The 1908 Empire Agency Literary & Dramatic" did not appear to have been any more successful than her uncle with several letters dated from 1915-1916 detailing their failed attempts at enticing British publishers with her manuscripts.

Networking

Additionally, Leslie made an effort to engage with literary figures in the communities she visited. This is most documented in her trips to New York, where she would stay in boarding houses with other like-minded individuals. Mount claims that Canadian literature began "in the cafes, publishing offices, and boarding houses of late-nineteenth-century New York" (2005, p. 18). Canadians aspired to be part of the literary culture that permeated America, but they also instigated "their own social and professional communities within and across these cultures" that were not exclusively Canadian (Mount 2005, p. 15). Leslie demonstrates this behaviour in a letter to her sister detailing her activities at a boarding house in 1894 and the people she engaged with, such as a foreign artist from Sweden, characterizing them as "all Catholics or Dissenters under this roof." These communities had benefits beyond camaraderie, as according to Mount, the connections often fostered literary and/or financial advantages (2005, p. 15). Leslie experienced this, claiming "one has offered me two letters of introduction and recommendations to Mrs. Frank Leslie here, and to the Editor of the Pall Male Gazette in London; and a young lad here (...of French and English descent) has offered to illustrate a little book for me and push the sale of it. He illustrates for Harpers and the Century" (1894).

Susanna Moodie

A connection that demonstrates Leslie's critical awareness for the benefits of networking is one that she established at a young age between herself and popular Canadian author, Susanna Moodie. A known professional backed by successful British publisher, Richard Bentley, Moodie served as an entry point into this world of publishing that Leslie was desperate to engage with to

pursue her passion. According to Gerson, a British publisher was crucial for the production and dissemination of Moodie's book (2009, p. 5). Moodie demonstrated an inclination to help Leslie achieve literary success based on her own experiences as an author, as she wrote "it would give me great pleasure to be able to serve you as I will know what it is to experience" (May 12, 1863). However, she failed to provide Leslie with a connection that could have potentially jump-started her career, further demonstrating how difficult it was for novice Canadian authors to pursue a successful career in writing.

Women in Publishing

As a woman, Leslie faced additional barriers to the literary world that predominantly featured and supported men. Based on her extensive research on early Canadian women writers, Gerson speaks to the challenges many literary women faced in attempting to establish careers both at home and abroad (2009, p. 6-8). Even Moodie, with strong connections to important publishing houses in England, was unable to help Leslie find a publisher. Moreover, large discrepancies in what women authors were paid compared to men made it harder for someone like Leslie to profit off their work. According to Gerson, Moodie only made £350 for all seven of her books, while fellow Canadian author, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, made £300 for a single volume of his book (2009, p. 5). Leslie attempted to navigate this environment by publishing her first book under a pseudonym, James Thomas Jones. While not uncommon at the time, Leslie rarely refers to this decision, nor provides any explanation for why she chose this name. However, none of her other works are published under this name, preferring instead to use her given name. Leslie made the choice to not hide behind a man's name and cloud her identity.

Leslie's Significance in Canadian Publishing

Although the decisions credited to Leslie often resulted in more obstacles in her literary career, they are indicative of an individuality on her part that speaks to the strength of her character. Despite the barriers that Leslie experienced and numerous instances of rejection, she never gave up her passion for storytelling. Even up until her death, Leslie was writing stories and contacting publishers about her pieces. Although her financial situation added a level of urgency, her motivation and ability to persevere in the face of adversity came from within. When measuring her level of success, as an author she fares poorly, but as a woman striving to make her way in a man dominated world, she is a success. Leslie managed to maintain her autonomy over her life in where she lived, who she interacted with, and how she spent her money, while also managing to support others who were less fortunate. She is an important Canadian literary figure not for what

she produced, but for how she chose to overcome the obstacles that she faced.

Conclusion

This paper argues that Leslie was moderately successful in her literary career. She never gained great fame in her lifetime or beyond, but she fulfilled a passion for writing and managed to support herself in the process. With her books, she claimed that she “lived and kept the house paid taxes and interest from the book along” (Leslie 1897). Throughout her fonds, Leslie displayed her unique relationship with the literary world of her time. She managed to navigate publishers at home and abroad, while dealing with the numerous barriers that existed for novice writers. While her letters revealed a hint of disappointment regarding her lack of literary fame, Leslie never appeared to lose hope and continued to pursue her passion of being a writer.

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