

Martha Ostenso



Photo courtesy of [Minnesota Author Biographies](#)

In 1925, [Martha Ostenso](#) published her novel *Wild Geese*. It was reissued in 2008 as part of the New Canadian Library. According to [McClelland.com](#), the style of "prairie realism" was utterly revolutionary, and the passionate protagonist Judith Gare "crossed all bounds of propriety and convention." The novel won awards and over \$13,000 in prize money, an astonishing sum for the time. It was also made into a film.

Ostenso was born in Norway in 1900, and migrated with her parents to the US first, and later to Canada. She met her husband, Douglas Durkin, at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and moved with him to New York, where she took the course he taught at Columbia, called "The Technique of the Novel."

She published a book of poetry published in 1924, and co-wrote a biography, *And They Shall Walk*, with Sister Elizabeth Kenny. Other novels include *O River, Remember* (1943), and *A Man Had Tall Sons* (1958). Ostenso's work has been widely translated and reprinted.

Later in life, Ostenso and Durkin lived and wrote in Hollywood, California, where they associated with actors including Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Henry Fonda. Ostenso died in Seattle in 1963.

[Faye Hammill](#) of Cardiff University has written an analysis of the success of the two women authors of *Wild Geese* and *Jalna*, two years apart, calling these books the "sensations" of the twenties, and saying that they marked the "coming of age of Canadian literature," a verdict that was overturned in later decades by the "changing emphases of the Canadian literary establishment." As the source of the picture above indicates, Ostenso was claimed by the U.S. as well.