

# PREFACE

**F**ROM TIME TO TIME, circumstances arise that allow us in a very appropriate way to single out individuals, organizations, and institutions for deserved recognition.

That is the case with this 25th anniversary publication of the critical quarterly, *Canadian Literature*.

For 25 years, and through the pages of 100 editions over the past quarter century, *Canadian Literature* quarterly has been a major voice in celebrating and encouraging Canadian culture.

This 100th edition of *Canadian Literature*, carrying as it does new works of contemporary writers, emphasizing new poems and essays on subjects of current interest to the writers, lends proof to the belief that literature in Canada is not only alive and well, but flourishing.

If it was the intention of the publishers of *Canadian Literature* to show in this anniversary edition that literature, and culture generally, is all around us in the present and not just something we inherit from history alone, then that objective is herein realized.

I am pleased to extend congratulations and warm best wishes to *Canadian Literature* and to all involved in the 25 years of achievement. As a country, and as a people, we are indebted to the pioneers of Canadian literature and their successors who have contributed so much to the growth and development of cultural excellence in our country.

I look forward to 25 more years of *Canadian Literature*.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE EDWARD R. SCHREYER



# SOMETHING VALUABLE TO SAY

I HAVE GREAT SYMPATHY with literary anthologists, although God (the author of all classification) knows they stick their necks out. The challenge they volunteer to outface is one of nomenclature, rubric, category; of nailing a flag to the mast as they sail doughtily between Scylla and Charybdis, or (in the native idiom) shoot the rapids.

At the mention of the sub-section CANLIT, high-principled vigilantes spring up on every side — some armed with scholarly lances and exploding bromides, some counting on sheer lung-power — to dispute the umpire's ruling, his methodology, his yardstick, his probity, and his sanity. The poor fellow must not only define the field of literature but also defend a gauge of quality within it, simultaneously holding at bay the zealots who believe literary excellence to be inseparable from external considerations of social, religious, political, sexual, and even scientifically verifiable merit. And while so engaged he must answer a riddle that has baffled generations of his countrymen and foreigners alike: *What is a Canadian anything?*

What is the earmark, so to speak, of eligibility? Birth-place? parentage? residence? citizenship? subject-matter? setting? diction? — each of which has at one time or another been adduced to include or exclude contenders — or is it some magical combination of such factors? And does the putative reader care one way or another about any or all of them? — unless, of course, he or she is trying to pass an examination or get a grant.

An anthologist of works by Canadian writers (define the terms how you will) may certainly set his own parameters, gaining what credit he can for candour and decisiveness and hoping that the label and list of contents will act as a sort of *caveat lector*. But there lurk profiteers — the advertiser, the sophist, the oracle — whose interest is served by creating confusion between label and contents: as for instance the publisher of *The Great Canadian Joke Book* (padded with universal chestnuts dolled up in local colour), the teacher who needs grist for his pedantic mill, or the dogmatist (his own premises unexamined) who insists that “It doesn't have to be Canadian, it has to be good!” — thus sinking the ship with its own flag-pole.

In brief, some parade the brand “Canadian” as a front for marketable shoddy while others shun it as a form of Scarlet Letter on that account. And both with

equal self-righteousness: the former regarding themselves as vestal virgins entrusted with the Native Flame, however feeble, and the latter viewing themselves as stern missionaries for World-Class Standards, however inapt. That the hypocrisy of the chauvinists has, until recently, drawn more attention than that of the high inquisitors is a great pity. Many critics in this part of the globe have become, from long practice, world-class experts in putting down Canadians for no other sin than being Canadian, all the while proclaiming their superiority to the narrow nationalism afflicting their less-perceptive colleagues.

The twenty-five years that mark the lifetime to date of the learned journal *Canadian Literature* has been a period of passage in our arts and letters from impudence to self-confidence. The adjective Canadian is no longer automatically risible or apologetic or reductive, but simply a catalogue code-word. In this quarter-century, broadly speaking, our anthologies have grown from sparse clusters of familiar gems set in frantic commentary to toughly culled selections from a substantial body of poetry, novels, essays, drama, biography, history, and all the other consecrated divisions. They are read by Canadians and are increasingly recognized by readers elsewhere, their provenance now less a matter of self-conscious image-making than of wider acceptance of a different perspective.

This perspective, moreover, is a congenitally pluralistic one; and it is possible to argue that at this time the world has need of such a perspective. This need would explain, for example, the proliferation of departments of Canadian Studies in universities in the United States, Britain, Australia, Italy, China, and other countries. (Perhaps the American tendency to lump Canadian with Commonwealth Studies tells us more about Americans than they know about us; but word that we share the continent with them is spreading.)

It is precisely for this reason that we should take note of some major impediments to premature self-congratulation. Our publishers, of both books and periodicals, are in critical financial condition. This is more than an aspect of general economic belt-tightening; it approaches communal hara-kiri. Neither the public nor the private sector seems sufficiently persuaded that if education and the arts are expensive, ignorance and barbarism are lethal. And at the very time when others have shown keen interest in our arts and letters, our governments at every level have only begun to grasp the urgency of facilitating cultural exchange between societies. In Beijing (Peking), where two universities have courses in Canadian Studies, the only substantial library of Canadiana is in the Canadian Embassy, which is in a compound that is off-limits to Chinese students. Of course, this will not matter if we have no books to put in the library; it would certainly cost less.

There is a crucial sense in which the value of all communication, including literature, can only be set by the addressee. "Canadian literature" is in effect the

## PREFACE

label on a package addressed "To Whom It May Concern"; it need not justify itself to the unconcerned nor seek a mythical universal approbation. The Germans find the plays of Oscar Wilde not especially funny but superbly organized; Tolstoy, unfamiliar with England, adored what he thought was Dickens' realism and had no time for Shakespeare's. The interested readership for what Canadians write has never been so large, regardless of what is read into it or taken from it. In the long run, it matters little what we judge to be Canadian about our literature or how we categorize our authors and their works; what matters, now that we have found our voices, and know that others feel we have something valuable to say, is that we should not dry up.

In that sense the medium is certainly the message. The production and circulation of a literature — especially in the context of a demonstrated demand for it — is one of the hallmarks of a society's vitality. The mighty clashes between vigilantes over badges, bailiwicks, and banners amount to little more than occasionally elegant trimmings.

At least one measure of Canadian literature is the very existence and perennial vigour of *Canadian Literature*. Many happy returns to it!

MAVOR MOORE

*Past chairman of the Canada Council;  
Professor, York University*

## HIGHER LEARNING AND NATIONAL CULTURE

I HAVE BEEN ASKED by the editor to comment briefly on the significance of this special 25th anniversary issue of *Canadian Literature* and I feel privileged to do so. The publication of this issue is a notable event, I believe, for several reasons. Most obviously, it marks a milestone in Canadian literary criticism by signalling the fact that for a quarter of a century we have been fortunate enough to have a journal of criticism and review that has concerned itself largely with the literature of the nation. During this time, the scholarship found in these pages has made a number of important contributions to our understanding of ourselves as a people. By putting the work of our writers, poets, and

dramatists into sharper perspective, it has helped explain to us the nature of their vision and given us a sense of what they feel to be important, both as Canadians and as individuals who are part of the larger human community. At the same time, this tradition of literary scholarship has alerted us to our own literary heritage and has prompted us to recognize and define standards of excellence in our thought and writing. Furthermore, by seeking to interest a broad audience in the topics it presents, *Canadian Literature* has done much to popularize the exciting world of Canadian letters at home and overseas.

In a somewhat larger sense, the publication of this special anniversary issue also serves to remind us of the important role institutions of higher learning play in sustaining and developing the cultural life of the nation. Since the beginning of the Renaissance 700 years ago, the critical study of literature has been a central part of humanities study in higher education and remains so today. In fact, by their very existence, journals such as *Canadian Literature* embody the major purposes of institutions of higher education. By seeking to preserve established knowledge, by creating new knowledge, and by disseminating what has been learned to the world-at-large, they advance the process of inquiry that lies at the heart of higher learning. Without question, they are the most important means by which we inform ourselves and others about the nature of investigation and discovery. Put simply, they serve as forums where ideas are examined for their worth, where older and conventional ways of thinking are challenged, where the values we hold are clarified, and where the nature of the human condition is viewed from many vantage points.

As a final note, let me say that in helping us to appreciate the world of literature and in providing us with scholarly insights into the meaning of what we read, the individuals who have worked on, edited and otherwise contributed to *Canadian Literature* over the past quarter of a century have clearly helped to enrich our lives.

K. GEORGE PEDERSEN

*President*

*The University of British Columbia*



## RHYTHMS OF DISCOVERY

THERE ARE RHYTHMS in the life of a magazine, rhythms that govern how it begins, who it draws, where it leads, and when it does these things all over again. As it must, if it is to stay alive. It must begin again, draw again, seek fresh perspectives and horizons it has not yet seen. But how to find them? where? It seeks its readers by following its writers, making a magazine somehow a “journal” in that other sense of the word as well: the explorer’s record book, sent home from the frontier with charts and sketches, memories of the past, glimpses of the unfamiliar, and tales of the miraculous. Do we promise that? Only to try.

With this issue, *Canadian Literature* turns 100 and steps into its second quarter-century. It is by no means the longest-lived of Canadian magazines, but it is the oldest critical quarterly to have taken Canadian writers and writing as its sole topic; and because of its subject, the most miraculous thing about it may well for some people be the fact of its survival at all. For there were many in 1959 — despite the fact that the newly established Canada Council and the newly published Massey Report were at the time calling for greater attention to Canadian culture — who watched the founding of *Canadian Literature* with disbelief. (Wouldn’t the journal run out of material, they said, and anyway who would read it? who would write? *was* there a Canadian literature? didn’t we already *have* somewhere an essay on Leacock?) But after the first issues there was no dearth of material, nor any lack of contributors with original minds and articulate styles. And there was an audience. Canada’s major writers and major critics have written for the journal. Over twenty-five years they have educated us how to read Canadian writing, and required us to expect more from it, to value the traditions we have inherited and to appreciate the writers writing among us now. And in this issue — in all their variety, expressing points of view that often conflict with each other, points of view with which this journal sometimes does not editorially agree — many of Canada’s major current writers reflect on people, politics, art, and

language. In the prose and poetry assembled here is a glimpse (yet only a glimpse, though through several sets of eyes) of the plural character of modern Canadian literature, and of the several subjects which currently preoccupy Canadian writers' minds.

Looking back at the way *Canadian Literature* began, it is easy to attribute courage, faith, and foresight to the founders. But theirs was also an act of deliberate planning and sheer determination. Some of them had been affiliated with other journals and were concerned at the time to draw attention to Canadian writing: Roy Daniells had helped found the *Manitoba Arts Review* before leaving Winnipeg for Vancouver; George Woodcock had edited *Now* before returning to Canada, and had recently been arguing in the *Dalhousie Review* for a journal of Canadian letters; Earle Birney had years earlier edited the *Canadian Author and Bookman* and was enthusiastic about the founding of a new Canadian arts magazine. *Canadian Literature* grew out of the concerted discussions of these and several other members of the University of British Columbia faculty, particularly Geoffrey Andrew and Stanley Read of the English Department, and Neal Harlow of the Library. A grant from the Koerner Foundation enabled the journal to begin production; the University invited George Woodcock to be the first editor; and then followed the years of discovery. There were many other people, of course, whose taste, judgment, and energy have enlivened and guided the magazine — among whom are the successive members of the production and editorial staff: Donald Stephens, Ronald Sutherland, Herbert Rosengarten, Laurie Ricou, with the assistance of Inglis W. Bell, Basil Stuart-Stubbs, Tina Harrison, Henny Winterton, Beverly Westbrook, and others still. But it is George Woodcock to whom so much of the journal's development is due. It was his editorial skills which built the magazine over its first eighteen years, his judgments which so personally affected its contents, and his critical expectations which have so markedly touched the recent course of Canadian criticism. In those eighteen years, the journal helped trace the growth and describe the subjects of Canadian writing, helped refine readers' sense of artistic accomplishment and focus attention on the waves of talent that emerged in the 1920's, the 1940's, the 1960's.

And now the journal is twenty-five. To celebrate, we are focusing in this issue less on the historical achievements of the past than on the fact that literature is a live art, happening around us in the present. And we are focusing less on theories of criticism than on the creative practice of writers themselves — their poems, their journals, their glimpses of the literary craft, and their views of the world around them. It has been one of the characteristics of *Canadian Literature* since its beginning that writers and critics have shared the pages, repeatedly integrating the twin processes of reading and writing. Here they range widely across subjects and forms, seeking self, seeking shape in the worlds they see and dream — they

## EDITORIAL

are map-makers all, reporting home on the territories of the mind, the memories of possibility, the miracles of language.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge here publicly the support the journal has received over the years: from the contributors and the readers first of all, who by their enthusiasm have helped create an audience for Canadian writing; from the University of British Columbia, which has published the journal as one tangible expression of its concern for the university's role in community education; from the SSHRCC, which has long assisted *Canadian Literature* financially; and from several organizations for their special help in financing this anniversary publication: the Koerner Foundation, the McLean Foundation, the Samuel & Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, the Canada Council, the UBC Alumni Association. It is a pleasure, too, to acknowledge the skills of Robert Reid, who designed the typeface of *Canadian Literature*; of George Kuthan, whose prints graced the magazine's early issues (and several of which are reprinted here); and of Charles Morriss, Richard Morriss, and Ron Smith, whose love for the art of printing has given the journal its visual appeal. We are grateful for the contributions they all have made to the journal's continuity.

We acknowledge the past. We celebrate the present.

Yet it is the future that draws us forward. While celebrating our heritage and the artistic talents around us, we live as readers and writers with an eye scanning the next horizon; always there is a possibility yet to come. It is this vitality that leads a journal on, to follow the rhythms of discovery into its next quarter-century: the urge still to tell of memory and imagination, and to seek new ways to send home maps and tales.

W.N.

