

CAUTIOUS INEVITABILITY

PROFESSOR DESMOND PACEY has rendered many services to writing in Canada, and particularly as the only considerable historian of literature in English-speaking Canada. To these we can now add another service, less substantial, but no less satisfying in its own way — that of persuading the *Times Literary Supplement* to admit, after having implicitly denied it twelve years ago, that something which can be called a “Canadian literature” has at last come into being. The new edition of Professor Pacey’s *Creative Writing in Canada* — recently released in England — was the subject not merely of a review, but of an editorial in the *TLS* which has some salutary things to say about both the character of Canadians and that character’s relation to their literary productions.

No one need mistake a Canadian for other than what he is; and if “character” is given a more particular interpretation, the Canadian is as resolute as any other national in asserting his identity, in the face of considerable odds. England on the one hand and the United States on the other are set to lure him off his independent track. But whether it is that the caution needed for such a difficult navigation spoils with self-consciousness the free expression of his identity, or that his character in its realization on a national scale does not insist upon being imaginatively interpreted, it is certain that he has fallen behind other Commonwealth countries in arousing curiosity abroad and establishing a sympathetic image.

Yet, with what the *TLS* notes to be a cautious inevitability, a literature that can be called Canadian and nothing else has struggled into recognizable being during the past decade or so, and, as the commentator again notes shrewdly, this is largely because self-conscious nationalism has ceased to be an issue of importance

in Canada, at least as far as literature and the other arts are concerned. Of the writers now emerging, he remarks:

They are not required to debate, as their predecessors were, whether or not they are or in what ways they should be Canadian. The lengthy argument over nationality has been talked out. However he is defined, the Canadian exists, and the writer can concentrate on what interests him, in the calm assurance that by being himself he best expresses the nation.

The editorial ends with an assurance which repeats what we have realized for a long time, but are nevertheless pleased to see appreciated by a viewer looking at Canada from the other direction and a long way off:

While our attention has been turned to more flamboyant developments elsewhere, Canadian literature has come modestly into existence and must now be taken as a fact.

The only fault we have to find with this pronouncement is that Canadian literature is a much larger fact than one might be inclined to assume from an examination of the *TLS* editorial, which mentions Brian Moore but not Yves Thériault, James Reaney and Jay Macpherson but not Jacques Godbout and Anne Hébert, or from a comparison of Professor Pacey's comprehensive title, *Creative Writing in Canada*, with his book's index, which contains hardly a French name.

Despite the pioneering example of A. J. M. Smith's bilingual *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, those who speak English, whether in Canada or abroad, are still too much inclined to take for granted that Canadians — and Canadian writers — live either in the Maritimes or west of Montreal. By doing so they not only exacerbate, as Louis Dudek emphasized recently in our pages, the sense of division between Canadians who speak English and Canadians who speak French; they also fail to take into their own vision and to transmit to others an area of Canadian literature at least as rich and original as that with which they are familiar. We appreciate the acknowledgment which the *Times Literary Supplement* has made of Canadian literature's coming of age, but we are disinclined to accept it for writing in English alone.