

923 Lincoln
St. Paul, Minnesota
April 3, 1964

Mr. Thomas H. Raddall
44 Park Street
Liverpool Nova Scotia

Dear Sir:

While doing research for a forty-five minute oral speech on "Canadian Literature of the Twentieth Century", the idea came to me to question Canadian authors about their writings.

Would you please answer the following questions, and return them to me at your convenience?

- I. What do you feel is the common bond which unifies all Canadian authors and distinguishes them from those of other countries?
- II. To what extent, or in what way do you think the characteristics of Canada, its land and people, have influenced your writing?
- III. What should students my age (Juniors in high school), get out of your works in particular, and Canadian literature in general?
- IV. Would you comment on this 1957 Canadian editorial?

"The dream of a distinctively Canadian culture still possesses us. It is an idle dream. In the first place, the fact of our sovereign independence doesn't make us a distinct nation, it only makes us a political unit. In the second place, we do not become more distinctly ourselves by pursuing singularity, by countering the Daughters of the American Revolution with the Daughters of the Empire, or Davey Crockett with Pierre Radisson. Such gestures, like the beaver-and-maple leaf school of writing are evidence of a provincialism, not nationalism."

Thank you very much for your time and help in preparing this talk.

Gratefully yours,

Charles R. Loban
Charles R. Loban

April 9, 1964

Mr. Charles R. Loban,
923 Lincoln,
St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Loban:

To answer your questions:-

1. I know of no common bond which unifies all Canadian authors and distinguishes them from those of other countries. In the first place Canadian authors are divided into two language groups, English and French. Even in translation, one to the other, the subject matter and attitude remain distinctively English or French. Apart from this, a number of Canadian writers have flourished best in the United States or in Europe. They remain Canadian writers in the same way that Ernest Hemingway remained an American writer, but like him they have written little about their country, and even that is the weakest of their work. There is a link between Canadian writers, English or French, who live at home and write about their own scene and the people in it, because that is at least the common ground of Canada itself; but it could not be called a bond, because the two people and their outlook are very different. In the same way there is a sharp difference between white South Africans who think and write in English and those who think and write by preference in Afrikaans -- the Boers. But a far better analogy would be the literature of Belgium, where the people are sharply divided between those who think and speak in Flemish, and those who think and speak in French. They are all Belgians, and in international politics they present a single face to the world; but there is no common bond in their literature except that it is written within one national boundary.
2. I live in Nova Scotia, which is almost an island on the Atlantic coast of Canada. I have traveled in other parts of the country, and have written a volume of Canadian history, but naturally I write most about the Nova Scotian scene, and the people in it, past and present. It is not one of the ^{rich} rich provinces of Canada, although it was one of the first settled by Europeans. For nearly three centuries life has been a hard struggle for the Nova Scotians, for their habitat is mostly rock and forest, set about by the dangers and hardships of the sea. These things have deeply influenced my writings.
3. Students in your junior high schools can get from Canadian literature a rather patchy picture of a people, mostly of British or French blood but long removed from Europe, living in the colder (and mostly barren) half of the North American continent. Life in our cities is not much different from life in yours, and Canadians who write in English about city life have little or nothing to distinguish them from Americans doing the same. Canadians who

write in French about city life give it a distinctive flavor because of course a French city in North America is something rare. But I need not point out that most of Canada lies outside and far beyond the cities, and this is where a truly distinctive Canadian life is being worked out. Writers tend to congregate in the cities and to cultivate a cosmopolitan view; they travel abroad whenever they can, and usually so do their characters. This can produce good literature, but it is not a literature distinctive of their own country. When they do write about their own country it is usually about town or city dwellers and their characters are somehow faceless -- they have nothing to do or think or say that makes them distinctively Canadian or American or Australian.

4. I agree with this paragraph with the exception of one phrase -- "It is an idle dream". To me the dream is active, hopeful and possible. At the present time the Canadians are still divided by language and by various provincial outlooks; but they are fumbling their way towards one nationality and a distinctive Canadian culture. It is only the impatient who throw up their hands and exclaim that it is hopeless. Their error lies in comparing Canada's sprawling disunity with the well knit United States. They forget that Canadians have had, and still have, a tougher set of circumstances to overcome. If I may quote from one of my own books ("The Path of Destiny"), speaking of the mighty growth of the U.S. nation in the 19th century compared with that of the Canadians:- "Figuratively and geographically Canada formed the huge mysterious attic of the continent, dimly lit and cluttered with strange obstacles, where like a small boy the Canadian moved with a lonely curiosity, conscious always of the snow on the roof above his head; while downstairs the large and exuberant family of the Americans surged with confidence through the warmer chambers of the house, throwing up the blinds one after another, and installing everything from churns to chandeliers."

Of necessity the Canadians had to wait much longer for their churns and chandeliers; and they must wait with patience for the self-confidence, the exuberance -- and the culture -- that comes of being one family.

Sincerely,

