



SAINT LAWRENCE COLLEGE

945 WOLFE AVE  
QUÉBEC 10, P. Q.

February 27, 1968

Mr. Thomas H. Raddall  
Liverpool  
Nova Scotia

My dear Sir:

I am working on a thesis that deals with the novels written by Nova Scotians and set in Nova Scotia.

In my thesis I plan to establish a definition of the novel. Then this definition would act as a guideline in a critical analysis of the novels involved.

At the moment the exact aspects that I will attempt to examine in my analysis of these novels are not definite. I would appreciate a few comments from you on the subject in general, and on the following questions in particular.

Do you think that Canadian literary critics are too negative in their approach to their subject?

One of the major criticisms of our Canadian novels is that they lack universality. Do you think that this criticism is true? If so, in what areas of the novel is the lack of universality most evident? Has Canada arrived at the stage where it can have a truly great literature?

When you first conceive a theme what are the biggest problems involved in expressing this theme as a novel? Do you have an acute awareness of theme as you write? These questions are prompted by two isolated experiences. In an interview W.O. Mitchell gave the impression that when he wrote he was simply telling a story. He would not say anything more explicit. Robert Frost replied to a student who had just asked him what one of his recently published poems meant, "I'll let the critics decide that."

I hope that you will find time to give some consideration to my questions. I will be very appreciative of any observations that you might make.

Yours truly,

*Edward Murphy*  
Edward Murphy

March 3, 1968

Mr. Edward Murphy,  
Saint Lawrence College,  
945 Wolfe Avenue,  
Quebec 10, P.Q.

Dear Mr. Murphy:

I enclose a copy of a lecture I gave two years ago. While my subject was specifically the historical novel, I gave some of my ideas on the novel in general, which may answer your questions. Of course, if one wrote a book about a happening yesterday afternoon, it's a matter of history really -- a remembrance of things past. If you come down to the fine point the only authors of novels that are definitely not historical are those in the "science fiction" field, whose fancies run far into the future.

A number of my novels are contemporary -- and by that I mean stories drawn from life in my own time. My most successful novel, "The Nymph and The Lamp", which has appeared in many languages, and as a TV play starring Robert Preston and Margaret Sullavan, was drawn from my own experiences and observations as a wireless operator on a desert island off the Nova Scotia coast. I was young then, and I am now sixty-five. To a young man of the present day the tale is historical.

You ask my opinion of critics. I don't know much about them. I've never subscribed to a clipping agency, so I've never seen more than a few of their reviews. Some were favorable. Some were not. I was struck with the obvious fact that most of them hadn't really read the book at all. How could they, in the flood of books that come off the presses every year?

I haven't read the "Literary History of Canada", published a few years ago by the University of Toronto Press, and written by a group of academic critics. A wise and respected non-academic Canadian writer (the late J.B. McGeachy) said of it: "Its compilers are unsure whether there is any literature to write about. Luckily they have no qualms about the quality of their own work. Prof. Northrop Frye writes in the last chapter, 'The book is a tribute to the maturity of Canadian scholarship and criticism, whatever one thinks of the literature'. It is sad that Canadian literature is so second rate. But what a mercy it is that we have such clever critics to tell us so."

Sincerely,