

## *Editorial*

In the consideration of literature in English as a global phenomenon Commonwealth literature is a major study and inevitably will become increasingly so. The legacy from British colonialism of the English language as a literary medium is one shared to a greater or lesser degree by such nations and regions as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Nigeria, the Caribbean, and India — to give a very incomplete list. The legitimacy of its use is sometimes an issue, in India and in African nations, for example, where mastery of the language is confined to a relatively small class and there is a challenge from mother tongues spoken by the majority. In other places, such as New Zealand or the West Indies, it faces no such rivalry and no such contention.

It would be foolish to forecast the future of literature in English in every specific part of the globe which has produced it, but one might note some broad tendencies. A surge of national pride in countries like Canada and Australia has led to the institutionalization of the study of national literatures in English (in Canada, in a major English component) in schools, colleges, and universities. This institutionalization has, in a span of about twenty years, transformed the consciousness of the reading public and supported increasingly strong domestic publishing industries. It has made Canadian and Australian literature entrenched phenomena within the national borders, and this entrenchment is undoubtedly here to stay. There are similar developments elsewhere, in New Zealand and the West Indies, for example, but in the latter one may note an increasing demand for recognition of works written in the vernaculars of the nations concerned. The West Indian vernaculars exhibit grammatical structures, rhythms, and articulations which depart more radically from the traditional “standard” than, say, Canadian or American English. It seems likely

that more literature will be written in this medium, and possible that it may lead the way to the establishment of a new and highly alienated "standard" for the region. Finally, even in those regions where English-language writing is challenged by pressures to return to mother-tongues, it seems unlikely that it will be universally displaced by these. In Tanzania, for example, where a *lingua Franca* exists in Swahili, this may indeed take place; in Nigeria, where English is one of four official languages, it seems less likely.

This number of *ARIEL*, which has produced in the past "National" special numbers on the literatures in English of Australia and New Zealand, the Caribbean, Canada and Africa, grows out of a conviction that the readers and writers in the English-speaking world have a great deal to learn not merely by "knowing themselves" but also by knowing "the other." Commonwealth countries share a common literary language as well as similar historical patterns of development. To see their literatures in their relations to each other is to broaden horizons beyond national boundaries and to raise necessary questions about value, canons, and forms.

The articles deal with the literatures of Singapore, the West Indies (Guyana), Australia, India, Canada, Africa, and New Zealand. Some, such as the one on Singapore writing, provide broad introductory surveys of territory unlikely to be familiar to the reader, while others, such as the one on Maori novelist Patricia Grace, are more sharply focused. Others, like the article on the Canadian journals of the explorer David Thompson, represent developments in criticism and scholarship in well-established Commonwealth fields.

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