

---

## Introduction

Gradually, gradually, Americans are coming to realize that they share the northern reaches of the North American continent with another country whose name is Canada. Quite another country at that. Moreover, we are beginning to appreciate that Canada has had a distinct, rich and unusual history, that its national character may just not be an innocuous extension of our own and that its destiny may not necessarily and politely be in accord with any we might seek to realize for ourselves.

I firmly believe that we Americans must make Canada a subject of continuous study, not only because we have this long, complex and often paradoxical relationship with that nation, but because we will so much better comprehend what *we* are as a people, what *we* might have been and what, for better or for worse, *we* will never be.

The Embassy of Canada in Washington, D.C., has now launched a series of primers on Canadian culture, IMAGES OF CANADA, for the explicit benefit of an American audience. The Embassy expects to issue three or four of these introductory narratives each year, all of them given over to the history and achievements of the arts and letters of English Canada and French Canada. The authors will be prominent Canadian writers, scholars, critics and artists, veteran observers of their country's cultural prosperity.

These essays will document and interpret the major themes and modes by which Canadians have endeavored to express their experiences, their beliefs, their values, yes, their aberrations and their complaints. And what we, the audience, will come to understand is that Canadian culture as witnessed in literature, drama, music, dance, film, the plastic arts, is vital and enduring.

It is a tribute to the importance of this

series that George Woodcock should have been invited to draft the first essay, *Northern Spring: The Flowering of Canadian Literature in English*. Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1912, Woodcock completed his education and launched his career as writer and editor in Great Britain, resuming residence in Canada in 1949. Three decades later, he may well be the preeminent man of letters in his country: the author of fifty books on such subjects as anarchism, George Orwell, Canadian society, the Hudson's Bay Company; as well as narratives of his travels in Mexico, South America and India; and volumes of poetry. It is as one of the founders and first editor of *Canadian Literature*, the senior academic journal devoted to this subject, that Woodcock has performed an especially valuable service. From the first issue in 1959, encouraging and expecting an informed, articulate assessment by his contributors, more than any other figure in modern Canadian letters, he has influenced the opportunities for artists and academicians in Canada to appraise and thus to celebrate their national literature.

Victor Howard

*Victor Howard is Professor of English and Chairman, Committee for Canadian-American Studies, at Michigan State University.*