

Our proud Canadian universities:

By DONALD CAMERON

The following is an abridgement of a story by Donald Cameron, published in Weekend Magazine under the heading *The Graves of Academe*.

The bright coloured hulls of the fishing boats stand brilliantly against the snow. A few lie beside the wharf, locked in the harbour ice. To the west, a lonely peel dragger is moored beside the Richmond Fisheries plant.

This is a good place to meditate on universities.

Inside a classroom nine men are studying navigation and seamanship, working toward their 40-ton master mariner's tickets. The instructor, Sherman Creaser, passes out charts and sheets of navigational problems.

Nine heads bend over Chart 4023, eighteen hands slide parallel rules over the desks, nine brains

grapple with the mathematics of the thing. Eight of those heads belong to working fishermen. The ninth belongs to a man who said, in 1967, that he would never have to take another examination. Next Tuesday, in Sydney, he will write for his ticket.

In 1967, you see, I had finished a PhD in English literature at the University of London, and as Stephen Leacock, who held a PhD himself, once observed, "The meaning of this degree is that the recipient of instruction is examined for the last time in his life and is pronounced completely full. After this, no new ideas can be imparted to him." Having reached that happy state, I was free to enter the courtly jungle of academic life, like a young warrior finally admitted to manhood; free to take part in the politics of the tribe.

The internal politics of university life are complicated and treacherous, but the basic rules are simple enough. First, university faculty hold various ranks. Lecturers and instructors are like privates, assistant professors like corporals, associate professors are sergeants and full professors are warrant officers. Above the enlisted men are the officer ranks: the department chairmen, the deans (sometimes flanked by assistant and associate deans), the academic vice-president and the president himself.

Second, one university's pay scale is much like another. An associate professor's salary is more than comfortable, whatever university he may adorn, and it is unlikely to vary by more than \$1,000 or so across the country. As a result, prestige, rather than sordid cash, is the objective of an

academic career.

MEASURING PRESTIGE

How do you measure prestige? For the professor, prestige flows from degrees taken at top universities, and from articles in learned journals and books from scholarly presses.

The prestige of a university in turn derives from the prestige of its faculty — and top faculty can demand special library budgets, special laboratories and equipment, reduced teaching loads, money for travel to distant conferences, and an adequate supply of free labour for their research projects in the form of graduate students. You can make some rough judgment of a university's prestige by looking at the size of its graduate school, its library and its labs, its professional schools and its annual list of publications by faculty. When I was a graduate student at California, we used to amuse ourselves by playing a version of Snakes and Ladders, in which the winner got a special chair at an Ivy league university, while the loser wound up in a state agricultural college with library holdings under 60,000 volumes.

Obviously a university which has gone to some pains to secure crack scholars expects them to produce. Marshal University hires young Dr. Lightning fresh from Princeton or Harvard; it assumes he will begin at once, in Leacock's phrase, throwing off articles and books like driven snow from a rotary plow. If he duly performs, he's promoted and awarded "tenure", which means it's extraordinarily difficult and messy to fire him. If he doesn't, his contract is not renewed.

If he's let go, however, the fact



Peter Hsu photo

York Student, caught pondering role of universities.

that he has taught at Marshal makes him attractive to Brigadier University. Since it's considered bad form to offer a man a job at a rank lower than the one he already holds, Dr. Lightning leaves his assistant professorship at Marshal for an associate's job at Brigadier. After a few years, he's offered a full professorship and the job of department chairman at Major State College. He turns it down to become dean of humanities at Lieutenant College of Education. Every time he moves to a lower ranking university, he takes a higher rank in the faculty.

Did you think professors were basically teachers, people of wisdom to whom you humbly committed your son or daughter? Nope. Students are a necessary evil; they make it possible for universities to winkle large amounts of money out of governments. But research and publication is where the careers are built.

HEAR PROTESTS

I can already hear the protests from across the country: from the University of British Columbia, which has instituted Master Teacher Awards to try to restore the balance; from Trent University in Peterborough, which used to bill itself as "the Oxford of the Kawartha Lakes" and has tried to build itself around residential colleges and tutorial sessions; from tiny Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, which thinks of itself as offering intimate, high-quality education and which occasionally does so. Hardly anyone really likes the system, and many an academic dreams of changing it. But scholarship is an international affair, and a book like Northrop Frye's *Anatomy Of Criticism* is like a personal advertisement anywhere in the world. The quality of a person's teaching, by contrast, is known only locally, by his students.

Which are the major-league universities? In the English-speaking world, Oxford and Cambridge were the leaders for generations. The general impoverishment of England has left them struggling, but they still rank high, particularly in the humanities. So do London and Edinburgh, and one or two upstart English schools such as Sussex.

Canada has no major-league universities, and only one which comes close, the august University of Toronto, with its proliferation of faculties, colleges and institutes, its imposing library, its graduate programmes in a bewildering variety of specialties, its Marshall

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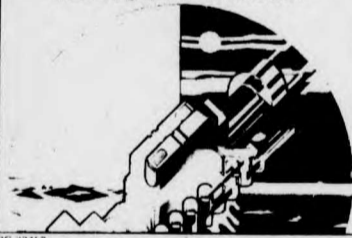
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