

Canadian content

A search for ourselves

By Craig MacPhail
reprinted from the Ontario
by Canadian University Press

"Something that's Canadian is small potatoes, second rate almost by definition. I think that's rubbish! But that view is still prevalent amongst our senior administrators and scholars," Professor Thomas Symons speaking to the Ontario Arts Council, May 6, 1976.

"I have noted with wonder and horror how our own creative artists have been ignored by our own 'scholarly' institutions. They find it reasonable to study, analyze, annotate the work of contemporary American, English, French and Russian composers, but not our own. Is that being Canadian, or just foolish? Maybe our composers are not yet masters. Maybe they don't deserve to be iconized and turned into heroes. If so, let our university scholars be among those who tell us so. They study our music in Arkansas but not Ontario" - a musician speaking to the Commission on Canadian Studies.

There is a lack of Canadian content in the courses offered in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Not simply a lack of in-depth study of the Canadian arts or society but a lack of course content concerning basic Canadian characteristics. More than any other developed country in the world Canada lacks Canadian content in its educational programs.

To attempt to answer this neglect of Canadian studies the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) set up

the Commission on Canadian Studies in 1972. It was chaired by Professor Thomas Symons, the founding president of Trent University in Peterborough. The commission worked with representatives from the AUCC's 65 member institutions with an advisory board and research assistants. The first two volumes of its report were released in March 1976 under the title *To Know Ourselves* and a condensed version was recently released in paperback as *The Symons Report*.

The commission worked in more than 40 communities and heard from more than 2,500 people, received more than 1000 briefs and met with about 200 academic, social and cultural agencies.

One dean of graduate studies at a major university reported that Canadian students have little or no knowledge of Canada and its institutions. He stated that it is difficult, even dangerous, for students to proceed further for academic or professional qualifications if they don't know the society in which they will use their specialized knowledge.

In nearly every discipline the commission found a lack of focus on its Canadian aspects. In many cases the commission found that students were more enthusiastic about Canadian studies than the instructors were.

In English literature courses the commission found a lack of courses offered in Canadian literature. From a survey that was conducted in 1972-73, 49 departments of English literature offered more than 1,400 undergraduate courses, only eight per cent of

these courses dealt with Canadian literature. Many universities gave the students the opportunity to study major Russian, British or American writers, but only recently have courses on Canadian writers been offered. One particular school offered more than 60 graduate courses in English literature, but only one in Canadian literature.

The reason for this lack was to put a dominance in some departments of non-Canadian faculty who were not interested in Canadian literature. Also the commission was told that some senior Canadian faculty discouraged younger teachers against emphasizing Canadian literature because this might be detrimental to their advancement. "Until very recently," one correspondent to the commission noted, "Canadian literature has been denigrated as a swamp into which the serious scholar ventured at his (economic) peril."

Recently the attitudes that Canadian literature is naturally inferior have fallen by the wayside. The commission noted that largely through the input of students interested in Canadian writers many departments have upgraded their programs.

A tremendous neglect of Canadian content was found in the social sciences. Only recently social science departments in universities were developed. From 1937 until 1970 only 30 doctorates in sociology were awarded in Canada, a similar situation existed in anthropology. To handle the dramatic expansion of these departments universities had to

rely on faculty from outside the country to develop the programs. The faculty members were familiar with an academic tradition outside Canada: many used foreign textbooks, published in foreign journals and used foreign research. The result, the commission stated, was a lack of focus on problems that are specific to Canada. They note the neglect in academic study of the North, of Canada's Indians and Canada's particular problems with trying to maintain a bilingual and multicultural society.

The training for professions tend towards having a North American attitude to their profession than a Canadian view, the report pointed out, even in law training. One representative at a commission hearing objected to the entrance requirements of Canadian law schools. They require students seeking admission to write a test designed and administered in the United States. "My objections are two," he stated, "first, the qualities for which it tests and second, the content. The test, three and a half hours of multiple choice questions, can only be done at flat-out speed. It favours the clever over the reflective, the glib over the thoughtful, the machine minded and the technical-oriented over the literate and perceptive. In short, it embodies all that is objectionable in the American corporate ideal."

The list of examples the Commission on Canadian Studies found goes on and on but the response to the final report was tremendous. Most universities in

Canada have established committees to examine and recommend action on matters of Canadian studies. The National Research Council has established a new program of national interest grants to encourage and assist scientists at Canadian universities to undertake research specifically related to problems of national importance. Centres for Canadian studies have been set up in Britain, France, Germany and Japan; one is currently being established in Italy.

Thomas Symons believes that these developments reflect a change in attitude. The largest problem he cited was a conscious and unconscious neglect of Canadian studies.

"There has been quite a mental shift in the balance of thinking," Symons stated. "I think the report has countered some of the unconscious neglect and made it difficult for people to get away with the conscious neglect."

The Commission on Canadian Studies maintains that it doesn't want to increase Canadian content on patriotic or political grounds. The commission believes that a society, like an individual, needs to know its context in the world. "Canadian studies..." the report states, "must be based on nothing less than the urgent need for self knowledge: to know who we are, what we want at this time and in this place, where we have been, where we are going, how we can get from one to the other, what, as a people, we have and what we need, what our responsibilities are to ourselves and to each other."

Marijuana treatment

Marijuana may help treat certain kinds of blood and lung cancer, according to new research.

Pot -- and its active substance, THC -- has been used for years to help nausea in persons undergoing chemotherapy treatments. But now scientists say THC may actually help stop cancer.

In tests done by the National Cancer Institute, active ingredients in marijuana significantly slowed the growth rate of lung cancer in mice. And researchers also found that THC inhibited the growth of cancer in rat bone marrow -- leading some people to hope that one day pot will help leukemia patients. (NEWSSCRIPT)

5,000 bottles

Two young men were evicted from their Sacramento, California apartment recently -- and a cleaning crew made an unusual discovery. There were about 5,000 empty Lowenbrau bottles neatly stacked in the closets.

White paint numbered every five hundredth bottle, leading the apartment manager to speculate that "Somebody was keeping track". Somebody was also doing a lot of drinking. Each man would have had to consume about three-and-a-half bottles a day for the two years they lived there, at a total cost of about \$2,000.

The former tenants left no forwarding address. (NEWSSCRIPT)

Mon- Fri- 10:00- 9:00 Sat - 10:00- 5:00
SUB TOWNE 454-5222

STUDENT UNION BUILDING

**THIS WEEK'S
SPECIAL**

20% off

**Down-Filled
Pullovers**

**Men's and Women's
Reg \$78
Now \$58**

ATTENTION:

All Grads.
We need your
Head in
Our Business
call

JOE STONE
Photographer

Grad photo taken up to
the 1st week of Dec.

Ready for Christmas giving

Phone for an Appointment 455-7578

480 Queen St.