

Canada Council

thinking and acting. I would hope that Canadian art and literature would always disturb us. How then can our standards be determined, not standards for censure or suppression but community standards for acceptance and rejection? Here it seems to me that one could do worse than cite at length the criterion set for the Supreme Court of Canada, by Mr. Chief Justice Bora Laskin as follows:

In seeking a Canadian community standard based on the average appreciation of art, the Court, in my opinion, is not limited to a settled national consensus. The average in community attitudes is better struck according to the range of exposure that that particular art, or art forms, have had in the localities of Canada where art is exhibited.

In other words, standards should be based on familiarity, on study and on considerable exposure. Judgment stems from knowledge, understanding, and responsiveness to the collective community experience—of writer, publisher or reader—which is every nation's literary heritage.

It has been the basis of the Government's cultural policies in literature to encourage and stimulate the suppliers of our literature, because the ultimate beneficiary is our nation as a whole. I am sure Hon. Members opposite would agree that our literature, no matter what its nature, enables us, in the well known words of Tom Symonds:

—to know and understand ourselves; who we are; where we are in time and space; where we have been; where we are going; what we possess; what our responsibilities are to ourselves and to others.

Thirty years ago the framers of the Massey-Levesque Commission's Report asked plaintively:

Is it true, then, that we are a people without a literature?

Today, in large part because of the various measures of support the Government has been able to institute, both indirectly through the Canada Council and less indirectly through support programs of the Department of Communications, we can point with great pride to an extraordinary growth in Canadian writing on the one hand and in the size and enthusiasm of Canadian audiences on the other, because Canadian writing has established its place not only in the literary history of this country but throughout the world.

The written and published words are flourishing in Canada in manifestations sufficiently varied to respond to all possible tastes. This signifies without any doubt that the spirit of artistic and intellectual freedom is alive and well and growing in Canada. Productivity and artistic maturity are proceeding hand in hand.

Today writers' lives are a collective success story in creativity, productivity and public esteem, both here and abroad. Critical attention and media recognition have been coming to Canadian writers as never before. But they also need to have enough to live on. The Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) criticized the fact that this Bill was being debated today and suggested that we should be talking more in terms of economic concerns. That point was picked up by the Hon. Member for Perth. I would agree with the Hon. Member for Perth to the extent that this is an economic matter, because we are concerned about Canadian writers, their livelihood and just how they are able to live. For example, and this may come as

rather a surprise, the median income of full-time writers in Canada was, according to Statistics Canada for 1978, the last year for which we have complete figures, about \$7,000 a year. Income from royalties amounted to about \$3,000 a year. Canadian writers on their own are not making money hand over fist overnight. It is, as the Hon. Member for Perth has suggested, an economic debate and one which must be addressed with all sincerity and honesty.

Publishing in Canada is also a success story, and again not often a financial one. Canadian publishers have to face the full power and force of the highly successful great American houses, with their enormous home market base, and try to foster and increase the flow of Canadian books. In this context any support not given can be seen as leading simply to the waste of Canadian creative resources. The problem here is not how to give less, not how to censor, not how to constrict and subdue the natural flow, even if it does occasionally splash over us in ways that we might find uncomfortable. The problem here is how to support, nourish, fertilize and foster for the imaginative enrichment of us all.

It has been explained often enough in this House how grants are made by the Canada Council. For the benefit of Hon. Members present I suppose there would be no harm in repeating that explanation yet again.

All applications from individual artists are assessed by independent professionals, knowledgeable in the discipline of the applicants. For literature the juries have included such writers as Margaret Atwood, Dennis Lee, James Reaney, and Earle Birney, each of whom has won the Governor General's Literary Award. These jurors and appraisers are asked to evaluate the artistic quality of the applicant's work, his career and its place in the world of contemporary literature. Obviously the assessment is not made on a few works or a few words taken out of context. There are many books of the very highest spiritual content containing passages which, taken out of their setting, can startle and shock. Yet one would be foolish to judge them on an individual basis.

The Department of Communications also gives support to Canadian literature through its Canadian Book Publishing Development Program, which is aimed at improving the corporate health of Canadian publishers. The sale of these books increased by 23 per cent over the previous year. The Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee has now come forward with recommendations for certain modifications and amplifications in the programs of support for our literature. We plan to act rapidly in response to this report. Their recommendations are of the highest importance for our future intellectual and, consequently, moral growth as a nation. I do mean moral growth, in spite of the quotations that have been cited once again here today. A nation without its full, flourishing and free literature is really like a people without a voice, without expressed thought, without defined future commitments or without a vocal conscience, no matter how that conscience finds it necessary to express itself.