

Canadians follow Antonine Maillet's second bid for France's much-coveted Prix Goncourt, so French-Canadians react with pride to the critical acclaim with which Michael Snow's recent exhibition was received at the Centre Beaubourg in Paris. Other recent examples of dramatic successes on the international stage in which all Canadians have taken pride are the National Ballet's triumphant performance at Covent Garden this summer and the sell-out performances of Michel Tremblay's brilliant play "Forever Yours, Marie-Lou", which is now on tour in Belgium, France and Switzerland.

The fact that such successes are perceived simply as Canadian — neither French nor English — greatly eases the burden of defining ourselves as one or the other.

I'm sure it is clear from what I have said that in the field of cultural diplomacy, it is the universities that occupy a critical central place. If the principal purpose of cultural diplomacy is to promote better understanding among nations, is there a more essential player than the universities? The answer is most certainly no. Take simply the External Affairs programs. It is the universities that educate the post-graduate students from 18 countries under our scholarship program. It is the universities that are taking the new group of Chinese students about to arrive under the new Canada-China agreement, and it is they who are accepting Nigerian students under a new Cost Recovery Technical Assistance Plan. It is university professors who are working to make the Canadian Studies program in seven countries a success. It is university professors who are working in the Third World under CIDA programs or under AUCC auspices or under Commonwealth Scholarships administered by the AUCC, or under an exchange they have simply arranged themselves. It is the universities who have been educating thousands of foreign students over many years, offering courses in humanities, arts and sciences which broaden the knowledge of Canadians of the changing international world. And there are so many other ways in which you are such critical actors on the international scene — not least in promoting contact with your alumni abroad — for example in the Caribbean where so many of the political leaders are graduates of your universities.

Two things are essential: that the Canadian universities continue to be open and internationalist in the future as they have been in the past; and that the achievement of excellence is their overriding obsession. If these two principles are respected, Canadian universities will remain at the centre of Canada's cultural diplomacy.