

energy crisis' and 'free enterprise', it gains legitimacy not because it does or does not exist, but because it is uttered and heard repeatedly. Indeed, given the outpouring on the topic, one might assume it is more than a plight, perhaps a multi-volume decline and fall.

It is disquieting to sample the pronouncements, largely misguided, which have been made by politicians, academics, journalists and (here comes that word again) professional educators. There is, for example, the obligatory misunderstanding of the university's function which the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, J.S. Cullen, following in the tradition of others who have had that cabinet portfolio, recently articulated. Universities, he said, are not readying students for those crucial years after graduation in the so-called real world; no sound preparation for one's vocational endeavours are provided by a liberal (as opposed to a Liberal) education. In their October, 1976 issue, the editors of *Saturday Night* allowed Barbara Amiel to fulminate against the supposed deterioration of our universities. For Ms. Amiel the heinous crime of the liberalizing 60's was that students, regardless of their social circumstances, were encouraged to 'realize themselves'. No longer a sanctuary for the elite, the university was a place where "each individual was expected to make himself something of a man of letters." Just think, so her argument goes, of the inappropriateness of future waitresses and auctioneers reading and discussing Schopenhauer.

I do not wish to belabour the insensitivity of Cullen and Amiel. Their denials of the value of a humanistic education available to all, despite the fact that their sentiments are by no means localized, have constantly been muted by those educational theorists who maintain that a B.A. is not a vocational vehicle, not a means to a pragmatic and utilitarian end. The university has eloquent spokesmen to defend it on this front. However, except perhaps for Ivan Illich, the radical humanist who advocates taking education out of the clutches of administrators and the rigidified framework of the institution, and a few other unintegrated voices, such as those of Paul Goodman and Carl Rogers, no one perceives the universities' dilemma to be one similar to that enunciated by Hightower about the Church. That is, the clutter of professionals and the trappings of business and bureaucracy are primarily responsible for shoddy education. Too often, what Hightower isolates as the disease is taken to be the cure.

Specialists, armed with mandates to upgrade (we should all be comfortable with this word) the calibre of a university, ferret out declining standards: the introduction of courses in tap-dancing and smelt-fishing, the elimination of examinations, inter-disciplinary programs, grade

inflation—everything, in short, that is *external* to teaching and research. Retrenchment is demanded; a return to those presumably halcyon days before student activism when “A’s” were “A’s” and girls hadn’t been invited to the sexual revolution. Never mind that mandatory final examinations in many courses are likely to be extraneous and inapplicable to course content; that grading disproportionately becomes the central activity of academics and the central preoccupation of students; that grading’s sibling, ranking, falsifies by quantifying abilities which can only be measured by those who believe the social sciences are sciences.

What am I carping about? Two things, primarily: first, the all too prevalent notion that the university was fulfilling its role before the disruptions of the last decade. Two grand Canadian men of letters, Cyril Belshaw in *Towers Besieged* and F.E.L. Priestley in a “Report on Undergraduate Studies in English”, although they espouse the good and uplifting ideals of an education in the humanities, nonetheless find in the innovations of the 60’s much to dislike. A million years ago in the 50’s, to misquote Samuel Beckett’s Vladimir, standards might have been accepted unquestioningly; however, whether they fostered a good climate for intellectual inquiry is something about which I have grave doubts. Pernicious is the nostalgic longing for the good old days if seating plans and other authoritarian trappings of education are to be resurrected. Second, and most exasperating, is the present tendency of elevating the institution above the activity, the professional above the professor. Preoccupation with the minutiae of the institution’s operation—credits, calendars, degree regulations—spawns the bureaucracy which chokes the university and retards instead of facilitates its seminal academic activities. (A glance at *The Globe and Mail’s* ‘Career Opportunities’ reveals the fissiparous business side of the academy.)

‘Professor’ and ‘professional’, in the current sense of these words, are antithetical. It was not always so; both have the same root word and a now obsolete meaning of professional is professorial. However, the meanings of the words have divagated and are yoked only by those who would demand of professors that they be something other than what they should be, humanists, or even amateurs. Yet except for Russian hockey players, no one is comfortable with the appellation, amateur, least of all academics who take taxpayers’ money and Bill Davis’ jibes about being at the cottage. I suspect that the desperate desire for professional respectability is behind much of the university’s busy-ness. There is, it seems, a compulsion to justify eight hours of teaching a week and

few other hours of visible productivity. It is not enough for aspiring professionals that a good deal of time may be spent reading and thinking. That these pursuits may be fruitfully engaged in beside streams, on sabbaticals or even at cottages probably cause bureaucrats chained to desks by their own lack of imagination (and, perhaps, a lack of militancy) to gnash their teeth and cry "irresponsibility". Irresponsibility it, of course, may but certainly need not be. I am reminded of Jorge Luis Borges' paean to leisure as one of the basic ingredients of intellectual life; this remarkable scholar and fiction-maker (how delightfully the two co-exist in him) writes, "[I] have devoted my now long life to literature; to teaching; to idleness. . . ."

Another who celebrates consciousness and the uncluttered contemplation of it as intrinsic to any teacher or thinker is William H. Gass. He speculates wittily:

Imagine for a moment what would happen if the television paled, the radio fell silent, the press did not release. Imagine all the clubs and courses closed, magazines unmailed, guitars unplugged, pools, rinks, gyms, courts, stadia shut up. Suppose that publishers were to issue no more dick, prick and booby books (surely one of the pithiest statements extant); movies were banned along with gambling, liquor, and narcotics; and men were suddenly and irrevocably alone with themselves.

Our coda might be, what would happen if university committees did not meet, its computers did not function and its institutional encumbrances were minimized.

That their calling is unsuitable for professional stature makes many university people skittish. In "The Academic Study of English Literature" (*Critical Quarterly*, 1959), still the sanest rationale I have read for a liberal arts education, Helen Gardner examines the defensive responses to the quandary in which people such as these find themselves. She writes:

The notion of English as a 'soft option,' a subject which exists for the benefit of the weaker brethren, and particularly the weaker sisters. . . was a bogey. It still is. The original way of meeting it was to insist on the inclusion of a liberal amount of Anglo-Saxon and Philology, to act as a 'stiffening' on the highly absurd assumption that some hours spent in doing what you did not want to do would compensate morally and intellectually for hours spent indulging yourself in studying what you wanted to study. I suspect that the same uneasiness in face of the charge of 'softness' is one motive behind the various attempts in our own day to professionalize English literature and make it a kind of 'closed subject' which can be discussed profitably only by experts.

metastudents, people who are aware of the need for intellectual inquiry and who delight in the process of education, whether the trappings of the degree (tests, grades, etc.) are present or not. Students such as these are rare; however, they are so not because of crumbling standards. Authoritarian and rigidified systems did not and do not develop them; nor do professionals utilizing unnatural sciences discover the techniques for their production. Metastudents are nurtured in diverse ways, by diverse books and diverse teachers, in creative which is to say unique ways; they are accidents of the school system and its managers.