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Can'tLit: what Canadian English departments could (but won't) learn from the creative writing programmes they host

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ABSTRACT

Unlike all other major Anglophone points of comparison (e.g. USA, UK and Australia), Canada is disinterested in the national and global demand for doctoral programmes in Creative Writing. This paucity of PhD creative writing programmes is especially noticeable when Canada has the highest per capita undergraduate enrolment in the world, federal funding available for writing PhDs, and a low OECD ranking for the number of per capita PhDs. This illogical market denial stems in part from Canada's preference for housing Creative Writing educations within English departments, who are hostile to creativity and living Canadian writers. Canada pays national economic, social, pedagogical and aesthetic consequences for its globally anomalous disinterest in Creative Writing doctoral programmes.

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1. Say it ain't so

Novelist and Bath Spa writing professor Philip Hensher describes how thoroughly and regularly literature professors hate writing professors:

I learnt that there are people employed by English literature departments who hate literature and would put a stop to it if they could. They talk about literature being subversive and questioning of authority, but once they have admitted creative writing into a department they find that it can't be controlled and they don't like it. (Wroe)

tive writing (CW) programmes in university English departments (what Henscher calls 'the enemies of literature' [1998, 365]). Examples from Canadian university programmes, professorial hiring, national research funding and my own 16 years of work as a Canadian Creative Writing professor demonstrate a similar 'hatred' between Canadian professors of English and the CW programmes under their majority rule. This national preference for having those who write about managing the educations of those who write has negative aesthetic, political and economic consequences in and beyond Canadian education.

Canada's art historians and musicologists don't design and manage the education of its visual artists and composers, but English professors (who have rarely published books of poetry or fiction themselves) routinely control the educations of our writers, and with obvious costs to national and personal truth-telling. As indicated in [1998], the number

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