

The Plouffe Family, a television series based on one of his novels, was the most popular TV drama in Quebec 25 years ago. He is our only writer to capture the story of a poor working-class family in Quebec City's Lower Town in *Au pied de la Pente douce* and to achieve the same success in *La famille Plouffe*, about a poor working-class family in east-end Montreal.

In both cases, he realistically depicted the life of a class of Quebec society from which he had come. In both cases, he showed their joys and their sorrows.

It was quite a feat for a Quebec novelist to reproduce a slice of life of Quebec City and of Montreal in two different novels of the same period. This proves the extent of his talent and his keen sense of observation.

He told me one day that his model was the American writer Truman Capote. I think it was in his character to write photographic pictures of events in a clear, direct, precise, unornamented style.

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He was a member of the Académie Goncourt, which is a rare honour for a non-Frenchman. He was very close to Hervé Bazin, who is the current president of the Académie, and the quality of their style shows their generation. He was also an intimate friend of Maurice Druon, secretary for life of the Académie Française. He sent me his last book, "Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe", with a handwritten dedication in 1982. He said:

To Maurice Riel, I hope that you will include this book in your collection of favourite novels. In friendship, Roger Lemelin.

I would not want to take too long today; there is so much to say. Roger Lemelin enjoyed life, he was a good salmon fisherman, a good chess player and a good traveller. He did everything with great energy and gusto.

He was also a great journalist. He was editor in chief of *La Presse*, Montreal's great French newspaper. He made fun of the provincial authorities who had required him to obtain, under Bill 101, a francization certificate for his company, *La Presse*, the French newspaper!

Roger Lemelin, a Quebecer through and through, was also a convinced federalist. His ideas on the subject are in a book called *Les Voies de l'Espérance* (the ways of hope) published in 1979; in it, he refers to Senator Tremblay. He sent me a personally dedicated copy in February 1980. I ask you all to read this book, because it is timely. I found this sentence on page 67, which he wrote in 1971 for a conference in Vancouver, twenty-one years ago:

I say that our large ethnic group is a distinct nation within Canada, like it or not, even if you disagree.

His book is filled with comments that make sense, like

The real power today is communication.

I urge you to read this book, which I think is quite up to date.

We would really need Roger Lemelin these days. We mourn the passing of a man of conviction, a great writer and a friend.

Hon. Jacques Hébert: Honourable senators, allow me to subscribe wholeheartedly to the tribute that was just paid by Senator Tremblay to his friend Roger Lemelin, as well as by Senator Maurice Riel.

I am certainly not able to speak so well of this great Canadian. In fact, my colleague, Senator Tremblay, has the advantage of having been Roger Lemelin's friend and neighbour for a long time. As for me, I would not even dare to claim that Roger Lemelin was my friend. However, there was between us what I would call a warm and friendly complicity that made delightful those few moments that we shared over the years.

We had a lot of common friends, but we also shared values, as well as ideas on journalism and publishing. We both firmly believed in Canada and in federalism. As everyone knows, Roger Lemelin played a major role during the referendum in 1980.

I had an indisputable admiration for Roger Lemelin which I tried to hide from him as best as I could. The man I admired was not primarily the writer, the delightful novelist whose fame spread across our borders a long time ago, nor the great master of journalism who gave a certain brilliance to the newspaper *La Presse* during the ten years, I believe, that he presided its destiny. The person that I admired was the real man: both fiery and shy, generous and naive, he was an impulsive person that always pursued his enthusiasm, his convictions and even his fits of rage to the limit. He was a sort of great knight, and I have not met three of those in my whole life.

Roger Lemelin received all kinds of honours. He succeeded in everything that he tackled, just like a rash teenager (novels, journalism, television, cinema and even the business world). He used to say of himself that he was "a lucky jack-of-all-trades that was able to pursue several careers". He could have added Pablo Neruda's line: "I admit that I have lived." But this person, the oldest one in a poor family of ten children, who became millionaire, always kept his heart in the right place and remained a man of courage to the very end.

He was a passionate democrat, a liberal in every sense of the word, a tireless champion of Canadian federalism. While so many intellectuals from his generation, distinguished professors or small teachers, famous writers or simple penpushers, more less became separatists to be accepted if not loved by the young generation, Roger Lemelin never flinched. He remained himself: a man of freedom.

Whether they know it or not, whether they have read "Au pied de la Pente douce" or ignore the very existence of that novel, all Canadians are poorer today than they were two days ago for they have lost a free man.

At those bad times when intolerance is too common, when the poison of nationalism numbs the minds that were still valiant recently, when the foolishness of our elite is everywhere