

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

SM-8

"The Distinct Society"

25 February 1990
Québec City, Québec

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

Dear Peter,

It is almost impossible to make a general, overarching statement about political culture in Canada with the assurance that it will apply to the country as a whole. Nowhere is this more true--so far--than in Québec, which is at the same time a province, a "nation" (by most standards), a society distinctly different from any other I can think of and, not least, a huge part of North America.

Size is not as pertinent an issue as language, or history, but it is nonetheless a distinctive feature of this society's psychological terrain. The largest of Canada's ten provinces, Québec is sufficiently vast to encompass the combined territories of Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, Switzerland and both Germanies within its boundaries. In a more familiar context, Québec is more than twice the size of Texas. A generous endowment of natural resources helps to fuel the people's confidence in the future. With over a million lakes and streams, as much forest as Norway and Sweden combined, and an entrepot economy linked to the Great Lakes, one could think of Québec as a sort of giant Minnesota, with bigger hills and fewer Vikings. A more politically sensible comparison might be with Finland, that brave and industrious little littoral democracy in northern Europe. I will return to Scandinavian allusions next time, in a speculative overview of an independent Québec, but for now the main point is that this place is, in a very big way, different from the rest of the country and the rest of the continent.

Québec is home to approximately 6.5 million people (one quarter of Canada's population) 83 percent of whom speak French most of the time--at home, in school, at work and play, on stage and screen, and in their dreams. The nearly 600,000 anglophone Quebecers are concentrated in Montreal, as are thousands of immigrant families from Italy, Portugal, Greece, Haiti, Vietnam and other far reaches of the world. Most of Quebec's Inuit and Amerindian population, numbering about 83,000, live in the forest and taiga

Stephen Maly is an Institute Fellow studying the cultural and ethnic "nations" in Canada.

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

regions of the north. While the increasingly heterogeneous character of its population is reflective of similar diversity across Canada, a cross-section of opinion in Québec would not and could not serve as an accurate indicator of pan-Canadian sentiments. This much is obvious to even the most casual observer. You are in a different Canada.

It's not just the French language. Québec's geographic features are not unique, but their juxtaposition creates distinctive weather patterns which in turn affect the economy and the way people adapt to the changing seasons. Everyone knows Canada has cold, snowy winters, but the combination of frontal patterns, moisture, and topography in the St. Lawrence valley produces relatively humid, chilling winds and great mountains of wet snow. The landscape artists of Québec paint a distinctly different picture of February than their counterparts in Western or Atlantic Canada, and, save for the ubiquitous hockey stick, the still or animate life they portray is visibly separate from everywhere else in the country.

Locational factors also make it difficult to generalize about the self-images of Québeckers themselves, even after setting aside the complicating political reality that the people of this small nation with a large territory are also citizens of the world's second biggest state. There is a world of difference, for example, between Montreal and Québec City, the two largest cities and, respectively, Québec's commercial and political capitals. Montreal is very much bilingual (however much effort has been made to emphasize French), quite cosmopolitan, and exudes a spirit of openness despite the fact that most of the city is contained on an island. Québec City is almost exclusively French (the political elite and people in the tourist trade are the most common exceptions), provincial in outlook, and feels much more closed-in, partly because its historic district is enclosed by stone walls, but mostly because of history itself, which has produced a kind of siege mentality among people who believe they bear the honorable but difficult burden of ensuring the cultural survival of French North America on a continent dominated by Anglo Saxon values and the English language.

There is of course an even greater difference between the outlook of people in any city of size in Québec and the way of life in rural villages on either shore of the St. Lawrence River and at the remote mining camps, hydroelectric stations and Native settlements in the far north. Urban settings always and everywhere produce a somewhat different set of values and political ideas than those rooted in the country. The vivacity of greater Montreal, with nearly half of all the people in the province, contrasts with the quaint, modest and conservative charms of Québec's many rural villages and remote hamlets. I have little doubt that the urban/rural divide is a politically significant one, with measurable and perhaps even reliably predictable electoral results. Even without the aid of poll data, it is reasonable to suppose that country Quebeckers would prefer things to remain the same unless someone can guarantee their improvement, which is impossible--something that only citified folk would attempt or get away with in this day and age.

Class divisions are also evident. (This is still an unredeemed planet earth we're talking about.) Québec has some very rich people and some very poor people, and they rarely hang out together. Most people fit somewhere in-between, and they naturally tend to steer gawky visitors away from poverty and towards safer heights. In Québec City the more well-to-do work and live in Haute Ville (Upper Town) if not in the prosperous outlying

suburbs, and their day-to-day activity in the up-scale milieu of government offices, high-rise bank buildings, fashionable boutiques and gourmet restaurants is physically separated by a natural escarpment from most of the poorer families and pensioners who frequent the bars and community centers of Basse Ville (Lower Town). Traffic is fluid between these different levels and clusters of activity (there are 28 public stairways in addition to several major connecting roads), but the class distinction is still easily discernable. The triple-decker shopping centers in Haute Ville are commonly full of middle-aged women wearing elegant furs, while the much older, one-level bargain store agglomerations in Lower Town are haunted by tattered men and dowdy women, some of whom talk to themselves and scan for errant bits of pocket money along the edges of the worn tile floor.

Then there are the differences of perspective that spring from age gaps, and the many influences of education on political opinion, and so on and so forth. People lead separate lives, and think differently from another: they are not all the same. Even with all these caveats and categories of qualification, however, the temptation to speak in general terms about Québec's state of mind is still irresistible. No one can fairly speak for all of Québec any more than they can do the same for (or to!) the whole of Canada, but one of the truly distinctive attributes of this mostly French, mostly Catholic, mostly civilized and completely captivating society is that it all but compels outsiders to break the rules; it makes you want to try and get it right enough in your own mind to be able to say: "THIS is Québec."

I've tried. Forget it. Here are several glimpses, instead, of a distinctive society within Canada. Each thematic impression is headed by recently minted words or phrases in French. The first and last ones I made up myself; the others are legitimate.

Astral-Physique

People are rarely of less than two minds. For one thing, our brains are subdivided into hemispheres and regions with distinctly different functions. For another, we are somehow aware of something called a soul, even though its specific location is, shall we say, incognito. I would venture to add that the disharmony of estranged communities in civil society (not counting gang warfare) pales in comparison with the pandemonium in a typical individual's mind. When ordinary people find themselves in extraordinary political or cultural circumstances, normal schizophrenia can get to be a real headache. Just this morning, for example, the white Afrikaaner author of a new book about South Africa explained on TV that his story was all about a civil war in his brain.

Things are not so intense in Québec, but there is much to be said about the state of split personality in French Canada. The few francophone snobs I have encountered here are not so hung up on language as they are on mentality: they claim that educated Quebecers are more appreciative of creative works and abstract notions than their counterparts in Ontario or even California. It appears to be a right-brain sort of thing--they like opera, theatre, poetry, fine music and foreign films, whereas the left-brained clods of English culture prefer blockbuster hits and trips to the bank. There are a million ways to say this, and we've heard it all before, and perhaps there is some truth to it. A less condescending view is that

Québec's cultural elites have their heads in Europe and the rest of their corporeal selves firmly rooted in North America.

Politically active Quebecers keep track of the European Community as if it were next door. Well-dressed and classically-trained Quebecers look to Europe first for ideas about design; they display a preference for Italian shoes and a rare penchant for discussing the governmental structures of Belgium. Go to any pub, coffee bar or bistro, and like as not some young man or woman will be sipping cappuccino from a giant bowl and reading a magazine from Paris or Milan. Browse in a bookstore and you will find a large array of hardcover *bandes dessinées* (comic books) imported from Brussels and featuring adult adventure tales set in exotic places like Borneo, the Congo, and the Maghreb region of North Africa, all former haunts of European colonialists. A man named Jacques Bouchard has made a minor fortune and a culturally significant point by recommending to consumer goods manufacturers that their advertising in Quebec be specifically tailored not just to nuances of language but also to a different way of perceiving objects and their relation to the senses. *Québécois* (pronounced kay-bay-kwaw) artists are often said to have a "temperament" closer to France than to the rest of Canada, and such statements are borne out by the sometimes phenomenal success of Québec singers and writers in Europe while they remain relatively unknown in North America. And yet, at the end of the day, these Eurocentric tendencies are counterbalanced by all-American behavior traits, like a love of sports, a hearty devotion to country and western music, and a healthy respect for hygiene. "I love French films and French cuisine and the language of Moliere," a youthful *Québécois* told me--his face very near to mine, in the more intimate style of a European--"but I could hardly imagine living without my daily shower...people over there just don't bathe often enough!"

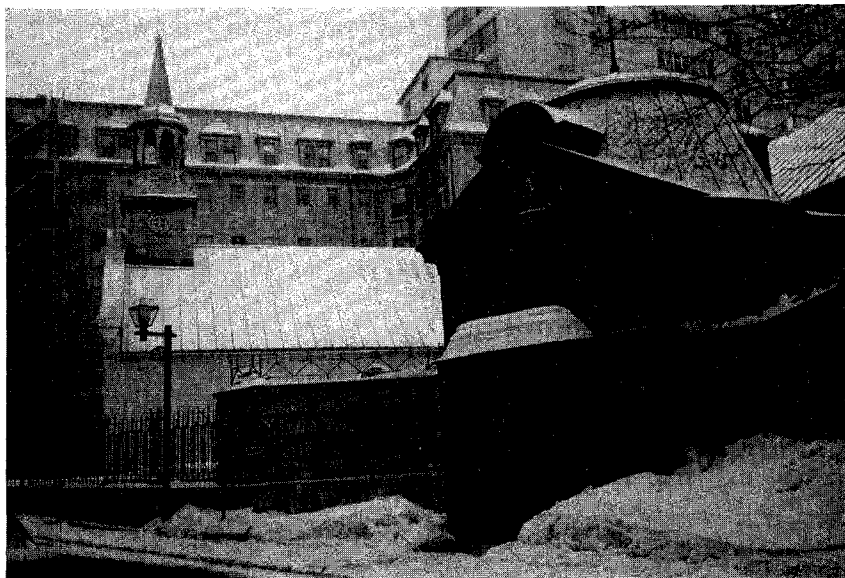
Owing to a common confusion over the meaning of certain terms like culture, sometimes anatomy and imagery get turned around. Claude Fournier, a prominent film producer, recently remarked that "Québec is the crossroads of North American mentality and European culture." Okay, so some Quebecers keep their minds at home and only occasionally let their appetites traverse the Atlantic. I know these people: they are preoccupied with money, and security, partly out of concern for their career prospects, partly out of devotion to family. They like the wide open spaces, but tend to take park lands and wilderness for granted; it is enough just to not feel overly crowded, and to get away for a few days of skiing and camping once or twice a year. They are a pragmatic lot, preferring to vote for winners if they are going to vote at all, preferring cable television to expensive nights at the cinema. What is it, then, in their daily lives, that smacks so much of Europe? Perhaps it is the vestiges of Old World religion (see below), or simply a different way of holding one's fork, knife and cigarette.

There are many Quebecers who must feel entirely at home in North America. Their minds are as divided as everyone else's, no doubt (there is always the problem of Canada), but there is no longer any need to look to Europe for cultural cues. Haute cuisine is great, but poutine is much more affordable, and not at all bad. A French Canadian invention, poutine (pronounced poo-teen) consists of pommes frites (fries), cheese curds (cheese curds), and a thick covering of tepid gravy. For a hint of Europe, substitute spaghetti sauce for the gravy and, *voilà*, poutine Italienne. (Fast food doesn't get any better than this.)

Catholicité

About 90 percent of Quebecers profess to be Catholics, but the number who actually believe in miracles and take the sacraments is much lower. If attendance at mass and engagement in wedlock (as opposed to living together in sin) are sure indications of faith, Québec is slipping. For all the important roles the Church played in the history of New France and for all its influence in shaping the institutions and architecture of Québec, most people these days appear to be devoutly secular and humanist. The change of habit (some call it modernization) is not complete, nor is it entirely contradictory. The humanism that is very much in evidence here, in the provision of health care, for example, and in the emphasis on "family" values in the media, is clearly not anti-religious or even anti-clerical. There are still lots of nuns and priests around, administering schools, counseling the young, comforting the sick and poor, but the secularization of Québec culture over the past 30 years has greatly diminished the political clout of the Catholic hierarchy. The Church has undergone a process of fossilization--the structures remain in place, but the content has changed, probably forever.

Catholic forms are everywhere. There is no casting one's gaze anywhere in the settled parts of Québec without encountering steeples and statues. Sequestered in the old, worn-down working class neighborhoods of Québec City are some of the most magnificent church buildings I have ever seen. They are something right out of...Prague? Rouen? Seville? (I don't know.) What would pass admirably as a great cathedral elsewhere on this continent is merely one of many parish churches here. They are empty, or nearly so, much of the time, but if bulletin boards are to be believed the basements fill up with bingo players on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and a critical mass comes together, so to speak, on Saturday evenings at five o'clock, to get Sunday's obligations over and done with ahead of time.



entrance to a seminary, behind a church, behind the Hotel de Dieu (hospital)

Let us now return to my fossil credo: the Catholic chapel two blocks from where we live has been turned into a public library. (The place always was and always will be, presumably, a great place to sleep.) There is another library just like it--or almost, it was once an Anglican redoubt--about a half-mile away, on bustling Saint Jean Street. Down in Basse Ville, the looming, gothic grey hulk of St. Roch church adjoins an enclosed shopping mall. One can enter the church directly from the main interior walkway; the side entrance is just past the A&W root beer stall. Old-timers sit smoking cigarettes on the concrete steps that once led up to a larger, double-door entry-way to the Church. It is rather amazing and somehow comforting to look for marked-down shoes or a watch battery or bathroom stuff in the shadow of stone walls and stained glass, and I wonder if this sort of experience could be had anywhere else, even in Europe.

The next step in the process might be to open all the doors and let people wander and chat in the aisles, or play checkers in the alcoves. This is not a novel idea: it comes to me via a 17th century Dutch painting hanging in the museum of the Québec Seminary. The picture shows groups of women on parade, a huddle of men engaged in animated discussion--probably about politics, or religion!--and a few stray dogs, all under the vaulted roof of a Christian temple. What better way to have people appreciate the incredible wealth, beauty and skill, and the enormous diversion of economic resources embodied in an 18th or 19th or early 20th-century house of God than to turn them into libraries and concert halls and nice places to meet your friends.

Place names and everyday turns of phrase in Québec also resound with Catholicité. Pick up an atlas. Find Montreal. Let your eyes wander anywhere but west (that's Ontario; très Protestante.) Did you ever realize there were so many saints in heaven? Ste. Alphonsen; St. Donat; Ste. Emilie de l'Energie; Ste. Clothilde; Ste. Hyacinthe: Who were these people? What did they do, or rather what did they suffer, to earn their sainthood and a permanent place on the highway and street maps of Québec?

We live on Ste. Anne street, near the corner of Ste. Ursule. Anne was the mother of Mary, and thus Jesus's grandmother. Oddly enough, she is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture, but somehow she became the patron saint of learning. At the enormous and stunningly well-crafted Basilica of Sainte Anne-de-Beaupré, a modern-day pilgrimage site about 20 miles from Québec City, one can offer prayers not only to Anne's statue, but also to the relics of her forearm. Such oddities beckon one's mind back to the age of obscurantism, but behind each of the thick supportive columns in the sanctuary is a jet black Toshiba television monitor, the better to see and hear the play-by-play on the altar. Ste. Ursule (Ursula), according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, was "probably" a 4th-century Roman virgin and martyr, although some ecclesiastical authorities claim she and her party of 11 or 11,000 compatriots (archeologists can't be sure) were British, and were slain by Huns in 451.

Dead saints--an oxymoron, I believe--do not have a monopoly in Québec. Not too far from here, adjoining the Anglican public library I mentioned earlier, is Zouaves Street, named for a corps of Catholic volunteer soldiers who served in the papal army in 1860, when the then States of the Church were menaced by the new Kingdom of Italy. There are towns named Ascension, Annonciation, Assumption and Epiphany; the nearest hospital is named The Infant Jésus: all rather distinctive, wouldn't you say? There are bishops' bones scattered around the many crypts in the province, and there are angels everywhere. At nine o'clock on one of the French TV channels, you can catch

Les Anges du Matin (angels of the morning), a talking heads program; at ten, it's La Cuisine des Anges, a humorous cooking show. At the Québec Museum of Civilization, there is a delightful exhibit entitled D'Être Aux Anges, which I first took to mean "Among the Angels", but the idiomatic translation is a more lofty "walking on air". The presentation is both a serious and fanciful study of the identity, history, hierarchy, and literary significance of angels of all types: guardian, avenging, fallen, cherubic etc. A person who takes a grave interest in all this, according to the accompanying brochure, is called an "angelologue", which sounds about the same in both languages. Would this sort of exhibit fly anywhere but in Québec?

You can't swear a blue streak in Québec French without implicating the Church. Here are a few ripe examples from the wonderfully comic *Anglo Guide to Survival in Québec*, a 1983 compilation of satirical tidbits edited by Josh Freed and Jon Kalina. Hostie (host) means "son-of-a-bitch"; so does calvaire (Calvary) and Sacrement (sacrament). If you hear someone say tabernacle in French, or baptême (baptism), what they mean is "shit". Maudite merde, as you may have guessed already, means "holy shit!", but don't get caught in the trap of literal translation, as maudite in front of anglais means "damned English". (If you hear this anachronism aimed in your direction, by the way, just say you're an American and most of your sins will be forgiven.) The daily papers stop short of profanity in their headlines, but when bad weather produces treacherous driving conditions, as it often does here, it is not uncommon to see winterized references to Dante's inferno.

Fossilization is more advanced in Montreal. Bank buildings, those respectably opulent cathedrals of commerce, tower over the Notre Dames of the city. Place Ville-Marie, an office and shopping complex downtown, anchors Montreal's first modern skyscraper, a cruciform tower designed by I.M. Pei and built in 1959. A more recent manifestation of sensible secularization is the Promenades de la Cathédrale, an underground shopping center located directly underneath a still-functioning Anglican cathedral, and graced with gothic-style structural forms overhanging the escalators and atrium area. I believe one can literally get on an elevator and end up in church. Every June 24 there is a huge parade in honor of St. John the Baptist. This has become an annual ritual thoroughly infused with the spirit of Québec nationalism. (This year, by the way, the government-subsidized procession will take place one day after the deadline for ratifying the Meech Lake constitutional accord...holy swear words, Batman!)

By far the most impressive and spiritually moving example of the fossil church is a movie called "Jesus of Montreal," directed by Denys Arcand, who also made "The Decline of the American Empire". The cleverness and sensitivity of the Jesus film are praiseworthy. (It won the Jury and Ecumenical prizes at Cannes and has been nominated for an Academy Award in the best foreign picture category.) The story involves a small troupe of actors hired to perform the Passion Play at St. Joseph's Oratory, another pilgrimage site and tourist attraction. "Jesus of Montreal" is not only a more inventive and challenging rendition of the last days of Christ than "The Last Temptation," it also illuminates what makes modern Quebec different from modern everywhere else. According to Globe and Mail critic Stephen Godfrey, the film "embodies the feeling of French Canadian camaraderie and solidarity in the jangling, commercialized, Americanized world in which Québécois live." I would love to tell you more, but I don't want to spoil a great show.

Nordicité

Voltaire is perhaps the first and most famous Frenchman to denigrate Québec by referring to it as "a few acres of snow." The entire province (then a colony) was almost traded to the British for the tiny Caribbean island of Guadeloupe in the 18th century. Since that time, of course, the cultural, economic and strategic importance of Québec has become better appreciated, even by France. More importantly, the people of Québec have taken great strides in adapting to their environment. The snowmobile, for example, was invented by a Quebecker named Bombardier. At the same Museum of Civilization mentioned above, there is a temporary exhibit called *Québec sur glace* (Québec on ice is my literal translation), and it pays picturesque homage to the many ways that the winter blues have been beaten back in this neck of the woods. Ice-skating, skiing, snowshoeing, hockey, curling, ice-fishing, auto and motorcycle races on ice, sailboats on ice, even canoe races across the ice-clogged St. Lawrence in February: all of these leisure time activities help to keep communities vital in the winter.



Broom Ball at recess

Louis-Edmond Hamelin is a geographer, economist, linguist, explorer, and founding director of the Center of Nordic Studies at Laval University in Québec City (the largest francophone institution of higher learning in the Americas.) He is also given credit for inventing the word "nordicité", which can now be found in French dictionaries. The term is pregnant with desire, Hamelin has admitted. Even after four centuries of endurance in these cold northern latitudes, most Quebeckers obstinately refuse to accept the fact of winter, and have yet to learn how to make the most of it, notwithstanding all their clever ways of having fun on the ice and snow. People speak of January and February as *la morte saison* (the dead season), and those who can afford it spend as much of this time as possible living it up on the beaches of Florida. Professor Hamelin is trying (even in retirement) to trigger something of a cultural avalanche by turning winter to Quebec's economic advantage.

The plan is to combine academic research with product development, public outreach and technological exchanges with other cold countries to produce a truly northern "spirit" among Quebeckers. The idea has already generated practical results. The Québec City Chamber of Commerce has organized several conferences on the theme of northern development, and Montreal will host the 5th Northern Intercity Conference in 1992, an event that will bring

together mayors, developers, engineers and planning officials from such cities as Moscow, Leningrad, Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo, Anchorage, Sapporo (Japan) and Harbin (China). Bell Canada and the provincially-owned utility, Hydro-Québec, are just two examples of large, inventive companies devoting considerable resources to cold weather research. In Hamelin's view--and one which is apparently spreading to places where it counts--winter is less something to be beaten or tamed or escaped from than a fact of life to which people should become much better adapted, for their own good.

Not everyone buys this Nordic stuff. As the population ages--a slow but sure process in Québec as much as anywhere else in the Western world--the appeal of Nordicité may start to fade. Nearly a quarter of the population will be over 65 by the year 2031, according to demographic projections. Cultural nationalists are in a race against time: old age versus the greenhouse effect. Not really: this is the kind of lame joke that springs into the mind of someone who is sick of winter and is suffering from a bad cold that hit home on the eve of yet another birthday. I can hear the snowplow-and-salt truck backing up again outside our apartment building, and the incessant banging on the roof is the handiwork of a city employee anchored to the chimney with climbing ropes. His job is to scramble along the gutters with a big wooden mallet, smashing the ice and snow that have collected on the old tin roofs of Old Québec. If you ever visit this place in winter, and find the sidewalk blocked by 2x4 boards leaning against the wall, watch out: a Nordicized spider-man is about to knock a metric ton of ice on your head. These guys would undoubtedly appreciate a fellowship to Guadeloupe, or Disney World.

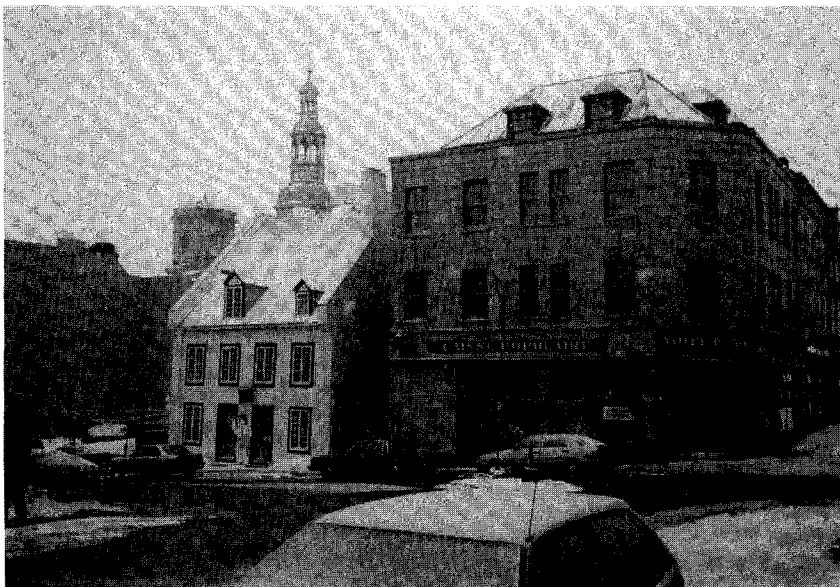
Québecité

This is a culture that may turn out to be eminently well-suited to the 1990s. Business, government, and working people are finding ways to cooperate in order to advance toward a collective but not a collectivist dream of the future. Unions still go on strike and bureaucrats still try to hide their mistakes and corporations still dump their wastes in the river and all that, but what is striking is that the youthful entrepreneurs are also increasingly nationalist in their political orientation. Their mission in life is a civilizing one: to get rich, and to spread the wealth. "Of course I would like to drive a Porsche," I was told by an engineering student who will probably enter politics, "but it is just as important to me that all Quebecers have good education and health care facilities."

The structures of community are designed in such a way as to maximize the earning power of people's talents and savings alike, all to the greater glory of Québec. I can offer several examples. At 1100 René Levesque Boulevard in downtown Montreal is the headquarters of Lavalin Corporation, one of the world's foremost engineering services firms. The company maintains an art gallery in the building, where one can look at recent works of painting, sculpture, and other media by contemporary Québec artists. Much of what I saw there last month was bold, semi-abstract, and somewhere near the edge of controversy. I suspect there are all kinds of artist-patron problems that have to be worked out behind closed doors, but what is clearly out in the open is solid evidence of symbiosis between the business and cultural community. It is something different from the ritual underwriting of public television by oil companies in the U.S. and it goes beyond the

kind of corporate support that helps bring Broadway hits to Toronto. That the Lavalin gallery is located on a street renamed to honor one of Québec's most beloved nationalist leaders adds further symmetry to this particular scene of social harmony.

The second bit of evidence is in fact a huge and profitable financial institution called the Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec, generally referred to simply as the Caisse (the proper pronunciation is somewhere between "cass" and "case"). This 24-year-old provincial pension fund is the largest single pool of capital (\$34 billion) and the biggest, most influential stock market investor in all of Canada. The Caisse is both a shepherd of private savings and an instrument of state in Québec. The directors are appointed by the provincial government, but their operations are legally autonomous. Over \$200 million of Caisse funds have been invested in small businesses in Québec--it bears a hugely popular responsibility for financing the province's economic diversification. The Caisse owns grocery stores and shipping companies and all sorts of enterprises, which is to say that Quebecers themselves have many and varied vested interests. When the CEO of the Caisse speaks, people pass the word around. He, along with a dozen or so other prominent business leaders still in their 40s have become, in effect, the new high priests of Québec culture. It is worth noting that several of these men are hinting that they will endorse political separation if the "distinct society" clause and other provisions of the Meech Lake accord (see SM-7) are not ratified later this year.



a Caisse branch in Québec City

Civilized Tribalism

"The Tremblays are Québec." So says a member of the Association of North American Tremblays, with some 180,000 "potential" members (not everyone is a joiner): 80,000 in Montreal, 40,000 in the Lac St. Jean/Saguenay River area (about 200 km. north and east of here), 25,000 in Québec City, the rest scattered across the continent. According to a story in the Globe and Mail, one in six families in the Saguenay area is named Tremblay, all the descendants of one Pierre Tremblay and his wife Ozanne Achon, who came over on the boat in 1647 and started things off with a brood of 12 children.

Perhaps the best known contemporary Tremblay is a playwright, poet and novelist, Michel, famous for his depictions of working class Montreal, but about to become even more so as a result of writing Québec's first indigenous romantic opera, "Nelligan", based on the tragic life of a 19th century poet. ("Oh, how the snow snowed!" wrote Emile Nelligan, an early nordicist.)

Tremblays take up 12 pages in the Québec City phone book. Gagnons have 9 and a half (André Gagnon wrote the music for "Nelligan".) The Côtés and Roys follow close behind with 8 pages each, the Simards have 6, Robitailles 4, Bergerons 4. One gets the feeling that Québec is sort of a huge, extended family: everybody is related, somehow, and this is the main reason why Québec is a nation and not just a jurisdiction.

Quebeckers support their creative kinfolk through the medium of the marketplace. As of November of last year, nearly half of the recording artists whose records had sold more than 50,000 copies across Canada were Québécois. Virtually all of these sales were in Québec itself. Another measure of solidarity: 8 of the 10 most popular TV shows on Radio Canada (the French-language division of the CBC) are made in Québec, whereas only 2 out of 10 on the English-language CBC channel are made in Canada. On Monday nights, when most of North America is tuned into Alf, Newhart, or the Wonder Years, Québeckers are religiously watching home-grown soap operas about working wives, hockey players and financiers.

There is an element of paranoia in Québec's otherwise healthy cultural self-absorption. Some of the Tremblays and Côtés and the rest feel menaced by the outside world--by Canada, by the United States, and by immigrants from distant shores. Quebeckers are not an ethnic group per se, but some members of the francophone elite and like-minded persons in the poorer classes tend toward an ethnocentricity bordering on racism. A controversial documentary film called *Disparaitre* (The Disappearance) contains unsubtle messages about the threat to French Canadian culture posed by Third World immigrants. In assessing Québec's immigration policy options, with the focus on multicultural Montreal, comparisons are made with the troublesome situations in Marseilles, Berlin, London, and Miami. The country whose ideas are looked upon most favorably in the film, if I understood it correctly, was Japan.

Lots of Quebeckers are worried about the low birth rate in the province, a sociological development generally traced to the weakening influence of the Church, economic growth, increasing materialism, influences from abroad: everything but the cold weather. A spokeswoman for a "pro-life" group in Québec recently testified before a committee in the federal House of Commons that abortion is the latest and most sinister agency of French Canada's demographic demise. I do not know whether she received a warm or frosty reception from the tribal elders upon returning home, but this is a civilized, open-minded society, full of people who can entertain all kinds of conflicting arguments within the confines of his or her own catholicized conscience.

Next time I will attempt to summarize several characteristics of a Quebec with one added distinction: sovereignty.

Salut! (Cheers)

Stephen Maly

Received in Hanover 3/7/90

THE GLOBE AND MAIL NATIONAL BESTSELLER LIST

THIS WEEK	HARDBACK FICTION	LAST WEEK WEEKS ON LIST
1	The Dark Half , by Stephen King (Viking, \$27.95). Twins, antagonists and the one soul they fight over for control.	1
2	Daddy , by Danielle Steel (Doubleday, \$24.95). Three generations of fathers seek stability in a world without their women.	4
3	Solomon Gursky Was Here , by Mordecai Richler (Viking, \$26.95). An alcoholic writer is besotted with the mysterious brother of a liquor magnate.	2
4	Caribbean , by James A. Michener (Random House, \$31). Politics and history from pre-Columbian times to the present.	5
5	According To Jake And The Kid , by W. O. Mitchell (Douglas Gibson/McClelland & Stewart, \$26.95). More stories about a prairie boy and a rural sage.	3
6	Clear And Present Danger , by Tom Clancy (Putnam, \$29.95). U.S. Air Force aces try to blast Colombian drug planes with amazing weapons.	7
7	The Pillars Of The Earth , by Ken Follett (Macmillan, \$29.95). A hanging, a curse, and the building of a cathedral in 12th-century England.	9
8	Spy Line , by Len Deighton (Little, Brown, \$23.95). Bernard Sampson hides in Berlin trying to discover why his wife left him for the KGB.	2
9	Foucault's Pendulum , by Umberto Eco (Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, \$29.95). Three Italian intellectuals feed occult data into a computer with dramatic results.	8
10	Stratight , by Dick Francis (Penguin, \$24.95). Gentleman jockey Derek Franklin searches for diamonds missing from his dead brother's business.	1
THIS WEEK	HARDBACK NON-FICTION	LAST WEEK WEEKS ON LIST
1	Home Game , by Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor (McClelland & Stewart, \$29.95). Musings on hockey, tied to the CBC TV series.	1
2	Dance On The Earth: A Memoir , by Margaret Laurence (McClelland & Stewart, \$26.95). The memoirs of the late, celebrated novelist.	2
3	After The Applause , by Gordie Howe, Colleen Howe and Charles Wilkins (McClelland & Stewart, \$26.95). Ten hockey legends discuss life after the game.	4
4	Latest Morningside Papers II , by Peter Gzowski (McClelland & Stewart, \$16.95). More from the listeners and regular guests of the CBC Radio show.	3
5	The New Founde Land , by Farley Mowat (McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95). A collection of three decades of the author's writings on Newfoundland.	7
6	Roseanne: My Life As A Woman , by Roseanne Barr (Harper & Collins, \$22.95). The television comedienne's life and times, so far.	8
7	Birds Of A Feather , by Allan Fotheringham (Key Porter, \$24.95). A polemic against the closeness of politicians and the press who cover them.	9
8	The House Is Not A Home , by Erik Nielsen (Macmillan, \$27.95). The former MP and deputy prime minister reflects on his long career.	1
9	Pail Hall , by Dick Beddoes (Macmillan, \$22.95). An affectionate biography of the czar of the Toronto Maple Leafs.	10
10	The Morningside World Of Stuart McLean , by Stuart McLean (Viking, \$24.95). The best of the author's quirky documentaries from CBC Radio.	2

Les bestsellers

The capital's French-language bestsellers are compiled by Librairie de la Capitale, Le Coin du Livre and Librairie Trillium. (Last month's position in brackets.)

Fiction

1. *Les Pérégrines*, by Jeanne Bourin (Editions François Bourin/Lacombe); exciting historical saga from France about three sisters in the Crusades. (1)
2. *La Chair de Pierre*, by Jacques Foltz-Ribas (Robert Lafont); novel about an architect in New France in 1675. Claude Baillif (2)
3. *Sire Gaby du lac*, by Francine Ouellette (Quinze); ecological novel, about saving a lake in Quebec, by bestselling Montrealer. (1)
4. *Le Diable en personne*, by Robert Lalonde (Seuil); psychological novel about a mysterious stranger in the Eastern Townships. (1)
5. *Un Grand pas vers le Bon Dieu*, by Jean Vautrin (Grasset); Prix Goncourt winner about three generations of Cajuns in Louisiana, from 1893 to 1920. (1)

Non-fiction

1. *Trudeau, le québécois*, by Michel Vastel (Homme); Ottawa parliamentary reporter argues Pierre Trudeau never helped Quebec. (1)
2. *L'Etat du monde 1989-1990: Annuaire économique et géopolitique mondial* (La Découverte and Boreál); state of world's economics and geopolitics. (1)
3. *Mémo Larousse* (Larousse); excellent thematic encyclopedia, beautifully illustrated. (1)
4. *Survivances 3*, by Georges-Henri Lévesque (La Presse); third volume of memoirs of a celebrated French-Canadian père. (4)
5. *Le Défi québécois*, by Christian Dufour (L'Hexagone); Quebecer tells why Quebec has trouble integrating with Canada. (1)

The People of Québec have distinctly different reading habits.