

## 19. MY YEAR AS A FRANCOPHONE, MONTREAL, 1962-3

Growing up in Montreal, second only to Paris in the size of its francophone population one would think that at school I would have spoken French as well as English, would have French as well as English friends. Nothing of the kind. It seemed that everything was being done, at least on the English side, to discourage English-French contact. As though the winners of the battle on the Plains of Abraham of two centuries earlier were reproducing their victory in the 20th century. For one thing the two groups went to different schools. What school one attended depended on one's religion--francophone children, Catholic Schools, that were mostly French, and Protestant children, schools that were English. Nothing equals the importance for youthful associations at school for defining one's world. Who one talks to, who one walks home with from school, at older ages what girls one takes to movies--these associations almost all start in school and often continue through life. The English mythology went so far that Franco-Canadians were not considered competent to teach French in English schools. And the two groups were separate geographically with English mostly on the west side of St. Lawrence Main and the French speakers on the east side.

But the best way of bringing the story up to date is with the talk I gave on the occasion when I was honored by the University of Quebec in Montreal. (Given in French, translation by Beatrice Keyfitz.)

### **Address given in Montreal, July 27, 1993**

My ties with French Canada began in earnest when Guy Rocher, at that time chairman of the Department of Sociology of the Université de Montreal, invited me to spend a year (1962-63) as professor of demography in his department. I would work with Jaques Henripin, a demographer who has since become widely celebrated. I was delighted with the idea and accepted on the spot. The first twenty years of my life had indeed been spent in Montreal, but in an English corner of Notre Dame de Grace, and my acquaintance with the city was essentially confined to Sherbrooke Street between Boulevard Decarie and McGill University, at most about a quarter of the city. One met a French speaker when one bought household supplies or needed a plumber. The streetcar drivers spoke French. "Here", I said to myself when I received Guy Rocher's offer, "is my chance to meet the other three quarters of my native city."

And those three quarters were full of surprises. My colleagues in the Universite had no resemblance whatsoever to the humble little Canadians of my youth. At departmental meetings and luncheons outside they were giants. No doubt their enlargement had something to do with the nationalism that had begun to flourish at about that time, a phenomenon which had drawn notice elsewhere: with nationalism had come the rise of an intellectual class that supported the new national configuration and was supported by it.

But this was only the dawn of the nationalist movement. We were still in an intermediate condition--when an English speaker joined a francophone group the language changed. It was preferable to discommode ten French speakers rather than one anglophone. The anglophone was courteous; he expressed regret for his incapacity, but he did not regret it enough to learn French.

The new pride of the francophones--at least when they were among themselves--was only the first of the surprises than awaited me. I had thought that given the diminution of anglophone influence the Province would seize the occasion to orient themselves even more towards church and family, towards all that belonged to the past, as was suggested by their watchword: "Je me souviens." The little farms along the roads and rivers would once again be the heart of their economic life. Quite the contrary: they were turned towards the future--towards technics, towards industry. They were open to the outside world, and especially towards France, which until then had often seemed too little Catholic if not atheistic.

But how to run their affairs without anglophone capital and managers? Business would surely be in trouble. For years the anglophones had stressed how they were needed for the division of labor in the province. But in fact under francophone management business experienced an expansion as never before.

Education also saw an unforeseen growth in quality and importance, at least unforeseen by me. The old system tended to form a thin layer of elites who boasted less of their utility than of their elegance. Under the banner once more of nationalism the system grew enormously. We witnessed the creation of CEGEPs, of new universities, among them the Université of Quebec, the host of today's ceremony.

As I have said, I was invited to Montreal to teach demography, but in fact it is I who have benefited from instruction--on how modernization takes place, on the link between modernization and nationalism, and on the role of language in these two movements.

During the past ten years I have watched Quebec, of necessity from Europe, and above all through French television. What I have noticed is the rapid evolution of a new culture which is not the metropolitan culture of France, but which is respected for its distinct qualities. When one listens to the news or a film about French Canada, one recognizes that it is not France, that it is not inferior or superior to France, but simply different.

But I realize that I am saying things that you undoubtedly know better than I. It is left to me to thank you from the depths of my heart for having invited me to become a member of the Université of Quebec.

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And what doesn't start in school starts in the neighborhood. In Notre Dame de Grace, notwithstanding the name, the neighbors were mostly English. (I remember the New Yorker having itself a good time with the Notre Dame de Grace Kosher Meat Market, that I did not find in any way anomalous, "Notre Dame de Grace" being simply the (never translated) name of the ward.)

I did my personal best from a very early age to overcome the drawback of the (artificial, one might say contrived) monolingual culture I was living in. La Presse came into the house when I was a boy and I looked at it and picked out the words I recognized. I remember my father's spoken French as pretty good. Later I read French books, often going down to Sherbrooke Street East, to Lafontaine Park, to borrow books from the French library there. But no amount of reading could match speaking French in a living context.

Then I went to Ottawa, which was largely anglophone, except that the hiring rules of the Civil Service Commission did permit the entry among my associates of a man by the name of Rochon, and especially of Raymond Lewis. Lewis, notwithstanding his name was thoroughly Francophone, and we met often for dinner with him and his charming wife. And Edgar Gallant, a young diplomat living in Hull, and his wife with whom Beatrice and I more than once dined.

Among the books that I knew was Everett Hughes French Canada in Transition. Hughes was on the faculty at the University of Chicago when I had my year there as a graduate student. He had chosen Drummondville for the classic study of the social effects of industrialisation. I attended classes by Everett in 1942-3 and was glad to catch up him and his wife Helen when I came to Harvard and Everett, having retired from Chicago, taught at Boston College.

But the climax of my acquaintance with French Canada came with an offer of appointment of a year at the Université de Montréal Department of Sociology. It came from Guy Rocher, sanctioned by Doyen Garigue, and promoted by Jacques Henripin, a polished demographer, student of Alfred Sauvy at the INED in Paris, the world's best known institution of demographic research. I knew Jacques when he was a beginning college teacher, and I have kept in touch right up to the present time.

I was overjoyed when the University of Toronto gave me leave after just three years of service. We rented an apartment on Maplewood Avenue just opposite the U. de M. took our Barby and Robert, and moved in.

The year was no less happy than I had anticipated. I had brilliant colleagues--not so much in their research publications, which were less than plentiful, but in their talk. It was almost as though Jacques Dofny, Denis Szabo, Jacques Henripin, Guy Rocher, Marcel Rioux published orally, in talks with colleagues. An outstanding member of the Department was the Abbe Norbert Lacoste, whom Beatrice and I came to admire enormously, A selfless man, Norbert, distressed by the fewness of recruits to the Church in this materialistic age and was doing his best to fill the gap with older men who would perform some of the functions of the clergy part time--what a change from when the smartest boys of each village were candidates for the priesthood.

A great company these, and when they assembled for lunch in a local restaurant the conversation was brilliant. They did not all love one another, but when someone attacked it was not with a bludgeon, but with a rapier. They expressed their opposition to some outrageous assertion (perhaps by myself) not with brusque denial but with irony and wit.

I remember one day on which the faculty assembled for lunch. The separatists had blown up a mail box the previous night, and we talked about the incident. Dofny, a Belgian, and Szabo, a Hungarian, said "Great, this will help you get your freedom." But the idea of getting freedom by violent means, familiar enough in Europe, struck us Canadian-born, French speaking as well as English, as repulsive. What entered all our minds without anyone saying was that freedom obtained by violence would most likely be followed by a regime of violence. And few Canadians are ready to welcome a regime of violence.

The U. de M. campus was on the other side of Mount Royal from McGill. But between the two campuses there was little communication. No surprise to one who was brought up in Montreal, a situation that I understand has changed in the years since I last visited. Hiring across the anglophone-francophone boundary has become more common than it then was.

The year was successful in that I had good students and congenial associates. But when I was invited to stay a second year I decided against--the separatist movement was gathering force, and I did not want to be made an issue between my liberal friends and the separatist hawks.

Over the years our friends included Jean-Charles Falardeau and Maurice LaMontagne, both of Laval University in Quebec City. They had been the students of the Dominican, Father Levesque, one of the most remarkable men I have ever met. I remember a glorious evening when all of us sat on the rug and heard Father Leveque, handsome in his white robe, discourse on everything from books he had read to Quebec politics, on which he held strong views. Always liberal, always level-headed, never trite.