Normand Beaupré (1935-)

Without a doubt the most prolific Francophone author in New England at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Normand Beaupré writes books in French and English that belong to several genres: ethnology, fiction, theater, memoirs, and philosophical and theological reflections.

Born in Biddeford, Maine on July 7, 1935, the eldest of the three children of René Beaupré, a carpenter and factory worker, and Rose Hubert, a shoe factory worker who became a housecleaner, Normand Robert Beaupré learned the two languages that would serve as his literary tools from birth. His bilingualism is due in large part to the fact that his father and mother, from Biddeford, Maine and Newmarket, New Hampshire respectively, were born into Québec families, from Beloeil on his father's side and Roxton Falls on the maternal side. At St. André’s parish school, under the direction of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, he was taught to read and write his two mother tongues, which he mastered with ease.

After completing elementary school in 1948, he did his secondary studies with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in Winthrop, Maine, a town where he remained until his marriage in 1958. He married Lucille Gagnon of Manchester, New Hampshire in the Church of St. André in Biddeford. The couple have one daughter.

Between 1951 and 1966, Normand Beaupré performed a series of jobs that he found commonplace and without a future, despite the decent wages he earned. He spent two years as a nailer at the Kesslen shoe factory in Kennebunk, three years at the Saxe-Glassman shoe factory in Saco, and four years in the Saco Lowell printing company in Biddeford, after which he entered the accounting office of the Pepperell Manufacturing Company in Biddeford. Unhappy with his situation, he decided to pursue a professional career.
Beginning in 1964, Normand Beaupré worked part-time at the Pepperell mill so he could study at St. Francis College in Biddeford, where he began a double major in French and English literature. In 1966, he left the Pepperell mill for a job in the language lab at St. Francis College. He graduated from St. Francis College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1967, then pursued his studies in French at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, where he received a master’s degree in 1969 and, thanks to a grant from the National Defense Education Act, a doctorate in 1974.

Subsequently, he returned to his alma mater, St. Francis College (which became University of New England in 1978), where he made a career as a French professor and administrator, directing the French Center, the College of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Advising, the Literature department, and chairing a Foreign Studies committee. When he retired in 2000, he was named professor emeritus.

In addition to his teaching career, Normand Beaupré started writing books. He was passionate about all forms of creativity, including wood sculpture, the topic of his first book, a bilingual work entitled *L’Enclume et le couteau: The Life and Work of Adelard Côté*, illustrated by Stephen Muskie, son of Edmund Muskie, Maine senator and former U.S. presidential candidate. This text was published in 1982 by the National Materials Development Center for French in Manchester, New Hampshire.

For Normand Beaupré, this was only a beginning because during the 1980s and 1990s, he wrote more and more, especially in French. In 1989, as a participant in the États généraux de la créativité francophone in Paris, he told the other writers representing their own regions of the French-speaking world that he already had six manuscripts ready to send to a publisher. However, it was a difficult time for Francophone writers in New England. Like the general public, Franco-
American readers were more interested in Anglo-American literature or perhaps Franco-American literature written in English. Nevertheless, Normand Beaupré refused to be discouraged; he continued to write and add to his pile of unpublished manuscripts.

Finally, his persistence paid off in 1999 when his manuscript, entitled *Le petit mangeur de cœurs saignants* (little eater of bleeding hearts), was published by the JCL publishing house in Chicoutimi, Québec under the title – at the insistence of his editor – *Le petit mangeur de fleurs* (little flower eater). It is a partly autobiographical fictionalized memoir: the portrait of a young Franco-American boy sensitive enough to discover both the good and bad in his family, his society, and his natural environment. Then came a third book, *Lumineau*, printed by the same publisher in 2002. It is a collection of legends from the state of Maine and elsewhere that the author had heard and remembered since childhood.

The appearance of a new phenomenon in the world of publishing, printing on demand, coincided roughly with Normand Beaupré’s retirement in 2000, inspiring him to take advantage of it. Now free to write full time, he was able to publish at least one book a year, if not two, with Llumina Press in Coral Springs, Florida. Between 2004 and 2012, he published fourteen works, including five written in French.

In a second fictionalized memoir, *Deux femmes, deux rêves* (2005), he talks about the relationship between his mother and his maternal grandmother, while telling the story of the emigration of Quebecers to New England. In addition, two theatrical works, *La Souillonne, monologue sur scène* (2006) and its sequel, *La Souillonne deusse, monologue sur scène* (2008), feature a character who appeared in a minor role in *Le petit mangeur de fleurs*; she is a Franco-American version of Acadian author Antoine Maillet’s *La Sagouine*. Perhaps the most memorable of all the characters created by Normand Beaupré, the Souillonne delighted audiences in New
England and even in Paris, Dijon, and Angers. Thanks to its success, the author published a third theatrical work, *Madame Athanase T. Brindamour, raconteuse* (2012), in which the main character is accompanied by her husband, also a storyteller. Finally, Normand Beaupré gave other Franco-American authors the opportunity to reach a larger audience with his anthology, *Voix francophones de chez nous, contes et histoires. Une anthologie franco-américaine* (2009). It includes four of his own stories with more than a dozen other pieces written by ten different authors.

Of Normand Beaupré’s nine works in English, two are translations of his French-language books: *La Souillonne, Dramatic Monologue* (2009) et *The Little Eater of Bleeding Hearts* (2010). Three others, all historical novels, deal with purely French subjects. *The Boy with the Blue Cap: Van Gogh in Arles* (2008) is a portrait of the artist-painter as seen by Camille Roulin, the son of Van Gogh's postman, Joseph Roulin, who was the subject of several famous paintings. *The Man with the Easel of Horn: The Life and Work of Émile Friant* (2010) is a fictional tale of the life and career of a little-known painter from Nancy, in the Lorraine region of France. In this case, Normand Beaupré took inspiration from a painting by Friant that he saw in the film *Il y a longtemps que je t’aime* by Philippe Claudel, also from Nancy. His recent book, *Cajetan the Stargazer* (2012), depicts the adventures of a young man aspiring to become an architect of Gothic cathedrals in France and elsewhere in Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

As for his other works in English, the subjects of which are quite eclectic because of their philosophical and theological orientation, the author was inspired above all by his religious studies with the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and his courses at the St. Francis College, under the direction of the Franciscans. Apart from his books, he has published a dozen or so articles and essays, in French and in English, in anthologies of other author-editors or in scholarly journals.
Over the decades, Normand Beaupré has become known in the French-speaking world and elsewhere. He is a member or officer of about twenty organizations of various types including, among others, the Société Historique Franco-Américaine, the Biddeford Historical Society, the Franco-American Heritage Center (now Gendron Franco Center) of Lewiston, Kermesse Franco-Américaine of Biddeford, of which he was the founding president, the Association des Écrivains de Langue Française in Paris, and France-Louisiane/Franco-Américaine in Paris. He receives many invitations to participate in conferences, do research internships, and participate in cultural discovery trips, not only in French North America and France, but also in New Mexico, Mexico, Brazil, England, and Germany. He has been awarded fellowships, including from the Fulbright-Hayes Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and France’s Cultural and Scientific Services. In addition, he has received several awards, among them the decoration of the Pléiade, when he was knighted by the Ordre de la Francophonie et du dialogue des cultures in 1990. In 2007, the Legislature of the State of Maine named him to the Franco-American Hall of Fame, while France named him an officer of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2008.

In 2019, Normand Beaupré is still writing, working on several books, including a third piece on La Souillonne.

Robert-B. PERREAULT

WORKS


- Nine books in English.

- A dozen articles, essays, etc., in French or English, in books and magazines.

- See also Normand Beaupré’s website: http://www.nrbeaupre.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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